

# THE NIGHTTIME NOVELIST

## WORKSHEET 8: Finding Your Voice

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**Directions:** Choose one of the following first lines, take it as your own, and without planning where you're headed, write a second one that seems to fit and interests you, and then a third, and keep going. Whenever you feel satisfied enough to stop, read back over what you've written and then put it aside, let a day or so pass, then come back and choose another first line and try the exercise again. With any luck, you'll begin to see things in common from exercise to exercise: a consistent pull toward the comic or the dramatic, perhaps, or toward a particular subject matter, or a style that's more colloquial or formal, whatever. What you find in your word-by-word storytelling and its tendencies might begin to suggest your baseline voice. This exercise has worked very well with my writing students; it never ceases to amaze me how twenty writers, all starting from the same first line, can end up with twenty completely different stories, in varied styles; their own voices have begun to kick in and steer the work.

Here are the first lines to choose from. Again, don't overthink where the story should go; in fact you shouldn't look any farther than the very next line to write.

Sheila needed the money, and so against her better judgment she said yes.

In the morning I see that things have gotten worse.

Bob has that look on his face again.

I almost speak up, but at the last moment I don't say anything.

George realizes he's made a mistake two seconds too late.