

JULIE

SHORT STORY: DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

Nice!  
Thank you!

Really?  
clique

It was a dark and stormy night as Jessica Snow drove along the treacherous curves of Highway Thirteen. Or rather, she hoped she was still on Highway Thirteen. At 10:00 P.M she veered off the interstate to take what she thought was a shortcut through the mountains. With pounding rain she wasn't sure if she missed the road sign and was driving along some back road leading to who-knows-where. It was now one minute to midnight, and her worst fears were true, she was way off course heading in the wrong direction as the lightning storm intensified.

\$100,000  
D...  
J...

She glanced at the passenger seat and the sack of cash. Hers was a heroic mission, a mission for the children at the orphanage. She picked up the money earlier in the evening, nearly one hundred thousand dollars, from a reclusive benefactor. She had to deliver it to the bank by 9:00 A.M. The benefactor was from out of state, the bank was in the city. Should she be late, the bank would foreclose on the orphanage, leaving sixty children without a roof over their heads.

J+  
Like  
Greek signs

"Oh brother!" she said as another bolt of lightning struck somewhere ahead. For a moment it was light enough to see the entire landscape. But there was not much to see. Tree's, with gnarled fingers, reached down from either side of the road. With the wind whipping them, they seemed to beckon to her:

"Come, steer to us, crash your car here!"

She drove on, not heeding them, clutching the steering wheel until her knuckles turned white.

Delete

Then it happened, the engine stalled as is inevitably the case in stories like this. A glance at the instrument panel told her the whole story: she was out of gas! How could she have been so foolish as to not fill up when she turned of the interstate.

Really?  
or such in  
important  
mission?

Delete

Jessica rolled her eyes.

like "six characters in search of an author"

JULIE

## SHORT STORY: DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

She coasted until she found a safe place to pull over on the narrow curvy road. It was a driveway carved between the trees. Houses were few and far between so she should consider herself lucky for this find. Delete

Delete "Yea, real lucky," she said in disbelief over this entire situation.

Another strike of lightning illuminated a wrought-iron gate crossing the drive. Beyond that, at about a hundred feet up was an Victorian house. The gate was slightly ajar and there was a light on in one of the house's upstairs window.

She reached to the back seat and grabbed her rain poncho and a flashlight. It was late but she hoped whoever was home would understand and let her call for road service and perhaps let her wait out the storm. She slipped into her rain gear and prepared herself to make a mad dash to the front door.

Continued "Hold on, wait a second," she said before jumping out. She took the flashlight and trained it onto the imposing wrought iron gate. There was a sign on it. "Ah, ha!" She tried to make out the words, it read: "Dr. Zacharia Zum, Taxidermist."

Knowing now who awaited her, Jessica prepared herself for that dash to the house.

? "But wait, there's more," she said, flashlight still on the sign, "another smaller line of print, it says ... 'and mad scientist'."

Deciding it must be a flavor of local humor, yet one more time, Jessica prepared herself for that dash to the house. She opened the car door -

"You must be crazy if you think I'm going in there! I'm waiting right here. I've got my cell phone, I've got Triple A, and I'll stay here until road service arrives."

JULIE

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Maybe  
I can  
do this  
voice!

"No, you're going up to that house and ringing the doorbell. The mad scientist and his Igor type assistant are peering at you already from the belfry window. They've got everything prepared for an exciting story."

"I'm not moving from this spot!"

"You have too."

"Uh uh. No way, no how. I'm not going up there. Who knows what kind of situation I'd be getting myself into?"

"Let me explain something to you, I'm the writer, and you're the character. It's my job to put you into inescapable predicaments. And using your wits and the meager resources I throw at you, you'll come out victorious in the end. But, before that, you'll be chased around by the mad scientist and his equally mad assistant. Of course, they'll eventually catch you, and when they do, they'll tie you up in chains down in their dungeon."

"And as you're tied there struggling to break free of your bounds, you're going to watch as the mad scientist prepares some bubbling concoction made of a disgustingly green fluid. Then you're going to look on in horror as Igor turns on a giant machine by throwing a monster sized knife switch on the wall. You'll get to hear as the electricity courses through the machinery while it hums up to speed. You'll scream in horror as you watch as they prepare the instruments which will turn you into their serving robot. And then the mad scientist will approach you and continue to struggle in your bounds, and he will make his maniacal laugh -"

"Stop right there. Don't you think this is a bit too much? Your story line reeks of a bad black and white movie. And what's all this about a sack of cash for the orphans on 'a dark and stormy night', who are you kidding?" Jessica looked into the rearview mirror to check her eye shadow.

"When I'm written into a story, I expect to be treated right. After all, I go the trouble of dressing

Al!  
seemingly

Sign  
Don't  
fall  
Make  
the  
action  
scene.

Julie

## SHORT STORY: DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

for the part, doing my hair and makeup, getting into the right frame of mind ... Some date this has turned out to be.”

“You’re forgetting something, you’re not real. I made you up out of my imagination. And you’re going to do exactly what I tell you to. And right now I’m telling you to go up to that house, ring the doorbell and ask to use the phone.”

“No way, I’m not doing anything of the kind. What kind of dumb blonde do you take me for?”

“It’s the only way you can proceed. I’ve written you into a tight situation. You have to go up the house if you want to move this story along.”

“I’ll see about that!” Jessica said as she fumbled in her handbag for her phone. She pressed 9-1-1. “Hello, I’d like to report a case of bad writing.”

“I see, where are you now, ma’am,” the dispatcher said.

“I’m in front of a spooky old house. The sign says ‘Dr. Zacharia Zum, taxidermist and mad scientist’.”

“I know where that is. Have you gone into the house yet?”

“No.”

“Good. We advise that you don’t. And your car is disabled?”

“Yes it is.”

“Out of gas, or a flat?”

“Out of gas.”

“Yes, you certainly are a victim of bad writing. We’ll send an officer by with a can of gas. And for what it’s worth, the Zum place has been slated for destruction years ago. It’s old and cliché, and isn’t used in today’s modern stories. It’s only standing because of the county’s budget

JULIE

SHORT STORY: DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

issues. Stay in the car, and if the writer tries to get fresh with you, like sending down a space monster or werewolf, call us back. The patrol car should be there in a few minutes.”

“Thanks, I’ll be waiting.” Jessica clicked off the phone.

“Are you happy now?”

“Happier than I was.”

“Because now there’s no story.”

“Sorry about ruining your plot. But, I’m not changing my mind.”

“Then, I think there’s just one more thing I need to write.”

“What’s that?”

The End.

###

Wink  
Wink!

DAVE  
SHORT STORY: DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

It was a dark and stormy night as Jessica Snow drove along the treacherous curves of Highway Thirteen. Or rather, she hoped she was still on Highway Thirteen. At 10:00 P.M she veered off the interstate to take what she thought was a shortcut through the mountains. With pounding rain she wasn't sure if she missed the road sign and was driving along some back road leading to who-knows-where. It was now one minute to midnight, and her worst fears were true. she was way off course heading in the wrong direction, as the lightning storm intensified.

She glanced at the passenger seat and the sack of cash. Hers was a heroic mission, a mission for the children at the orphanage. She picked up the money earlier in the evening, nearly one hundred thousand dollars, from a reclusive benefactor. She had to deliver it to the bank by 9:00 A.M. The benefactor was from out of state, the bank was in the city. Should she be late, the bank would foreclose on the orphanage, leaving sixty children without a roof over their heads.

"Oh brother!" she said as another bolt of lightning struck somewhere ahead. For a moment it was light enough to see the entire landscape. But there was not much to see. Trees, with gnarled fingers, reached down from either side of the road. With the wind whipping them, they seemed to beckon to her.

"Come, steer to us, crash your car here!"

She drove on, not heeding them, clutching the steering wheel until her knuckles turned white.

Then it happened, the engine stalled, as is inevitably the case in stories like this. A glance at the instrument panel told her the whole story: she was out of gas! How could she have been so foolish as to not fill up when she turned off the interstate.

Jessica rolled her eyes.

Sounds like  
a Radio Drama

I have been tricked  
by writing as opposed  
to by the story

## SHORT STORY: DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

She coasted until she found a safe place to pull over on the narrow, curvy road. It was a driveway carved between the trees. Houses were few and far between so she should consider herself lucky for this find.

"Yea, real lucky," she said in disbelief over this entire situation.

Another strike of lightning illuminated a wrought iron gate crossing the drive. Beyond that, at about a hundred feet up was an Victorian house. The gate was slightly ajar and there was a light on in one of the house's upstairs window.

She reached to the back seat and grabbed her rain poncho and a flashlight. It was late, but she hoped whoever was home would understand and let her call for road service and perhaps let her wait out the storm. She slipped into her rain gear and prepared herself to make a mad dash to the front door.

"Hold on, wait a second," she said before jumping out. She took the flashlight and trained it onto the imposing wrought iron gate. There was a sign on it. "Ah, ha!" She tried to make out the words, it read: "Dr. Zacharia Zum, Taxidermist."

Knowing now who awaited her, Jessica prepared herself for that dash to the house.

"But wait, there's more," she said, flashlight still on the sign, "another smaller line of print, it says 'and mad scientist'."

Deciding it must be a flavor of local humor, yet one more time, Jessica prepared herself for that dash to the house. She opened the car door -

"You must be crazy if you think I'm going in there! I'm waiting right here. I've got my cell phone, I've got Triple A, and I'll stay here until road service arrives."

## SHORT STORY: DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

“No, you’re going up to that house and ringing the doorbell. The mad scientist and his Igor type assistant are peering at you already from the belfry window. They’ve got everything prepared for an exciting story.”

“I’m not moving from this spot!”

“You have too.”

“Uh uh. No way, no how. I’m not going up there. Who knows what kind of situation I’d be getting myself into.”

“Let me explain something to you. I’m the writer, and you’re the character. It’s my job to put you into inescapable predicaments. And using your wits and the meager resources I throw at you, you’ll come out victorious in the end. But, before that, you’ll be chased around by the mad scientist and his equally mad assistant. Of course, they’ll eventually catch you, and when they do, they’ll tie you up in chains down in their dungeon.

“And as you’re tied there, struggling to break free of your bounds, you’re going to watch as the mad scientist prepares some bubbling concoction made of a disgustingly green fluid. Then you’re going to look on in horror as Igor turns on a giant machine by throwing a monster sized knife switch on the wall. You’ll get to hear as the electricity courses through the machinery while it hums up to speed. You’ll scream in horror as you watch as they prepare the instruments which will turn you into their serving robot. And then the mad scientist will approach you as you continue to struggle in your bounds, and he will make his maniacal laugh -”

“Stop right there. Don’t you think this is a bit too much? Your story line reeks of a bad black and white movie. And what’s all this about a sack of cash for the orphans on ‘a dark and stormy night’, who are you kidding?” Jessica looked into the rearview mirror to check her eye shadow.

“When I’m written into a story, I expect to be treated right. After all, I go the trouble of dressing



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for the part, doing my hair and makeup, getting into the right frame of mind ... Some date this has turned out to be."

"You're forgetting something, you're not real. I made you up out of my imagination. And you're going to do exactly what I tell you to. And right now I'm telling you to go up to that house, ring the doorbell and ask to use the phone."

"No way, I'm not doing anything of the kind. What kind of dumb blonde do you take me for?"

"It's the only way you can proceed. I've written you into a tight situation. You have to go up the house if you want to move this story along."

"I'll see about that!" Jessica said as she fumbled in her handbag (for her phone). She pressed 9-1-1. "Hello, I'd like to report a case of bad writing."

"I see, <sup>where</sup> where are you now, ma'am?" the dispatcher <sup>asked</sup> said.

"I'm in front of a spooky old house. The sign says 'Dr. Zacharia Zum, taxidermist and mad scientist'."

"I know where that is. Have you gone into the house yet?"

"No."

"Good. We advice that you don't. And your car is disabled?"

"Yes it is."

"Out of gas, or a flat?"

"Out of gas."

"Yes, you certainly are a victim of bad writing. We'll send an officer by with a can of gas. And for what it's worth, the Zum place has been slated for destruction years ago. It's old and cliché, and isn't used in today's modern stories. It's only standing because of the county's

## SHORT STORY: DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

budget issues. Stay in the car, and if the writer tries to get fresh with you, like sending down a space monster or werewolf, call us back. The patrol car should be there in a few minutes.”

“Thanks, I’ll be waiting.” Jessica clicked off the phone.

“Are you happy now?”

“Happier than I was.”

“Because now there’s no story.”

“Sorry about ruining your plot. But, I’m not changing my mind.”

“Then, I think there’s just one more thing I need to write.”

“What’s that?”

The End.

###

Ed

SHORT STORY: DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

\* any story that starts with "It was a dark & stormy night" has to be good

It was a dark and stormy night as Jessica Snow drove along the treacherous curves of Highway Thirteen. Or rather, she hoped she was still on Highway Thirteen. At 10:00 P.M. she

veered off the interstate to take, what she thought, was a shortcut through the mountains. With pounding rain she wasn't sure if she missed the road sign and was driving along some back road leading to who-knows-where. It was now one minute to midnight, and her worst fears were true.

she was way off course heading in the wrong direction as the lightning storm intensified.

She glanced at the passenger seat and the sack of cash. Hers was a heroic mission, a mission

for the children at the orphanage. She picked up the money earlier in the evening, nearly one hundred thousand dollars, from a reclusive benefactor. She had to deliver it to the bank by 9:00

A.M. The benefactor was from out of state, the bank was in the city. Should she be late, the bank would foreclose on the orphanage, leaving sixty children without a roof over their heads.

"Oh brother!" she said as another bolt of lightning struck somewhere ahead. For a moment it was light enough to see the entire landscape. But there was not much to see. Trees, with gnarled fingers, reached down from either side of the road. With the wind whipping them, they seemed to beckon to her:

"Come, steer to us, crash your car here!"

She drove on, not heeding them, clutching the steering wheel until her knuckles turned white.

Then it happened. The engine stalled as is inevitably the case in stories like this. A glance at the instrument panel told her the whole story: she was out of gas! How could she have been so foolish as to not fill up when she turned off the interstate.

Jessica rolled her eyes. \* pretty mild reaction

\* tenses: - story is in past before story should be past perfect: had

\* what is her connection?

\* not quite right

\* it's rare for me to remove commas

\* maybe "sack of cash on" - "on" is better

\* combine to make it clear

\* fine?

- great!  
- extremely clever!

\* = possible points to make live

Ed

# SHORT STORY: DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

She coasted until she found a safe place to pull over on the narrow curvy road. It was a driveway carved between the trees. Houses were few and far between so she should consider herself lucky for this find. *\* she thought she should ... ?*

"Yea, real lucky," she said in disbelief *4th wall* [over this entire situation].

Another strike of lightning illuminated a wrought iron gate crossing the drive. Beyond that, at *x? like on a hill? up like up the driveway?* about a hundred feet up was an Victorian house. The gate was slightly ajar and there was a light on in one of the house's upstairs window. *5*

She reached to the back seat and grabbed her rain poncho and a flashlight. It was late *time?* but she hoped whoever was home would understand and let her call for road service and perhaps let her wait out the storm. She slipped into her rain gear and prepared herself to make a mad dash to the front door. *\* or thought?*

"Hold on, wait a second," she said before jumping out. She took the flashlight and trained it onto the imposing wrought iron gate. There was a sign on it. "Ah, ha!" She tried to make out the words, it read: "Dr. Zacharia Zum, Taxidermist." *\* whoh - Psycho again?*

Knowing now who awaited her, Jessica prepared herself for that dash to the house.

"But wait, there's more," she said, flashlight still on the sign. "Another smaller line of print, it says ... 'and mad scientist'." *✓ ☺*

Deciding *this?* it must be a flavor of local humor, *[yet one more time]* Jessica prepared herself for that dash to the house. She opened the car door - *she thought? she said?*

"You must be crazy if you think I'm going in there! I'm waiting right here. I've got my cell phone, I've got Triple A, and I'll stay here until road service arrives."

Ed  
SHORT STORY: DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

"No, you're going up to that house and ringing the doorbell. The mad scientist and his Igor  
type assistant are peering at you already from the belfry window. They've got everything  
prepared for an exciting story."

voice of author-gal

"I'm not moving from this spot!"

"You have too."

"Uh uh. No way, no how. I'm not going up there. Who knows what kind of situation I'd be getting myself into."

"Let me explain something to you, I'm the writer, and you're the character. It's my job to put  
you into inescapable predicaments. And using your wits and the meager resources I throw at you,  
you'll come out victorious in the end. But, before that, you'll be chased around by the mad  
scientist and his equally mad assistant. Of course, they'll eventually catch you, and when they do,  
they'll tie you up in chains down in their dungeon.

"And as you're tied there struggling to break free of your bounds, you're going to watch as  
the mad scientist prepares some bubbling concoction made of a disgustingly green fluid. Then  
you're going to look on in horror as Igor turns on a giant machine by throwing a monster-sized  
knife switch on the wall. You'll get to hear as the electricity courses through the machinery while  
it hums up to speed. You'll scream in horror as you watch as they prepare the instruments which  
will turn you into their serving robot. And then the mad scientist will approach you as you  
continue to struggle in your bounds, and he will make his maniacal laugh -"

"Stop right there. Don't you think this is a bit too much? Your story line reeks of a bad black  
and white movie. And what's all this about a sack of cash for the orphans on 'a dark and stormy  
night? Who are you kidding?" Jessica looked into the rearview mirror to check her eye shadow.

"When I'm written into a story, I expect to be treated right. After all, I go the trouble of dressing

\*great!  
Feisty

Ed  
SHORT STORY: DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

for the part, doing my hair and makeup, getting into the right frame of mind ... Some date this has turned out to be.”

“You’re forgetting something, you’re not real. I made you up out of my imagination. And you’re going to do exactly what I tell you to. And right now, I’m telling you to go up to that house, ring the doorbell, and ask to use the phone.”

“No way, I’m not doing anything of the kind. What kind of dumb blonde do you take me for?”

“It’s the only way you can proceed. I’ve written you into a tight situation. You have to go up to the house if you want to move this story along.”

“I’ll see about that!” Jessica said as she fumbled in her handbag for her phone. She pressed 9-1-1. “Hello, I’d like to report a case of bad writing.” ☺ \*awesome!

“I see, where are you now, ma’am?” the dispatcher said.

“I’m in front of a spooky old house. The sign says ‘Dr. Zacharia Zum, taxidermist and mad scientist.’”

☺  
“I know where that is. Have you gone into the house yet?”

“No.”

“Good. We advise that you don’t. And your car is disabled?”

☺  
“Yes, it is.”

“Out of gas, or a flat?” ☺

“Out of gas.”

“Yes, you certainly are a victim of bad writing. We’ll send an officer by with a can of gas.

And for what it’s worth, the Zum place has been slated for destruction years ago. It’s old and cliché, and isn’t used in today’s modern stories. It’s only standing because of the county’s budget

ed

SHORT STORY: DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

issues. Stay in the car, and if the writer tries to get fresh with you, like sending down a space monster or werewolf, call us back. The patrol car should be there in a few minutes.”

“Thanks, I’ll be waiting.” Jessica clicked off the phone.

“Are you happy now?”

“Happier than I was.”

“Because now there’s no story.”

← \* maybe blancher?  
“it’s your fault”

“Sorry about ruining your plot. But, I’m not changing my mind.”

← \* maybe have her push back  
“that’s what you get if...”

“Then, I think there’s just one more thing I need to write.”

“What’s that?”

The End.

← \* what if the author says this  
and she chies out in horror?

“Nooooo!”

“We’ll see about that!”

SHORT STORY: DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

Sue

It was a dark and stormy night as Jessica Snow drove along the treacherous curves of Highway Thirteen. Or rather, she hoped she was still on Highway Thirteen. At 10:00 P.M. she veered off the interstate to take, what she thought, was a shortcut through the mountains. With pounding rain, she wasn't sure if she missed the road sign and was driving along some back road leading to who-knows-where. It was now one minute to midnight, and her worst fears were true, she was way off course heading in the wrong direction as the lightning storm intensified.

Condense  
↓  
overall,  
good setting,  
but can  
condense  
it

She glanced at the passenger seat and the sack of cash. Hers was a heroic mission, a mission for the children at the orphanage. She picked up the money earlier in the evening, nearly one hundred thousand dollars, from a reclusive benefactor. She had to deliver it to the bank by 9:00 A.M. The benefactor was from out of state, the bank was in the city. Should she be late, the bank would foreclose on the orphanage, leaving sixty children without a roof over their heads.

"Oh brother!" she said as another bolt of lightning struck somewhere ahead. For a moment it was light enough to see the entire landscape. But, <sup>really,</sup> there ~~was not~~ <sup>wasn't</sup> much to see. Trees, with gnarled fingers, reached down from either side of the road. <sup>↑</sup> With the wind whipping them, they seemed to beckon to her: <sub>awkward start to sentence</sub>

"Come, steer to us, crash your car here!"

She drove on, not heeding them, clutching the steering wheel until her knuckles turned white.

Then it happened. The engine stalled as is inevitably the case in stories like this. A glance at the instrument panel told her the whole story: she was out of gas! How could she have been so foolish as to not fill up when she turned <sup>off</sup> of the interstate.

Jessica rolled her eyes.



## SHORT STORY: DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

Sue

She coasted until she found a safe place to pull over on the narrow curvy road. It was a driveway carved between the trees. Houses were few and far between so she should consider herself lucky for this find.

"Yea, real lucky," she said in disbelief over this entire situation.

Another strike of lightning illuminated a wrought iron gate crossing the drive. Beyond that, at about a hundred feet up was an Victorian house. The gate was slightly ajar and there was a light ~~shone~~ <sup>shone</sup> on in one of the house's upstairs window.

She reached to the back seat and grabbed her rain poncho and a flashlight. It was late, but she hoped whoever was home would understand and let her call for road service and perhaps let her wait out the storm. She slipped into her rain gear and prepared herself to make a mad dash to the front door.

"Hold on, wait a second," she said before jumping out. She took the flashlight and trained it onto the imposing wrought iron gate. There was a sign on it. "Ah, ha!" She ~~tried to make out the~~ <sup>squinted</sup> words. It read: "Dr. Zacharia Zum, Taxidermist."

Knowing now who awaited her, Jessica prepared herself for that dash to the house.

"But wait, there's more," she said, flashlight still on the sign, "another smaller line of print, it says ... 'and mad scientist'." <sup>> speaking out loud, kind of strange</sup>

Deciding it must be a flavor of local humor, yet one more time, Jessica prepared herself for that dash to the house. She opened the car door - <sup>> kind of confused at first here</sup>

"You must be crazy if you think I'm going in there! I'm waiting right here. I've got my cell phone, I've got Triple A, and I'll stay here until road service arrives."

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Sue

“No, you’re going up to that house and ringing the doorbell. The mad scientist and his Igor type assistant are peering at you already from the belfry window. They’ve got everything prepared for an exciting story.”

“I’m not moving from this spot!”

“You have too.”

“Uh uh. No way, no how. I’m not going up there. Who knows what kind of situation I’d be getting myself into.”

“Let me explain something to you. I’m the writer, and you’re the character. It’s my job to put you into inescapable predicaments. And using your wits and the meager resources I throw at you, you’ll come out victorious in the end. But, before that, you’ll be chased around by the mad scientist and his equally mad assistant. Of course, they’ll eventually catch you, and when they do, they’ll tie you up in chains down in their dungeon.

“And as you’re tied there struggling to break free of your <sup>bonds</sup>~~bounds~~, you’re going to watch as the mad scientist prepares some bubbling concoction made of a disgustingly green fluid. Then you’re going to look on in horror as Igor turns on a giant machine by throwing a monster-sized <sup>dash</sup> knife switch on the wall. You’ll get to hear as the electricity courses through the machinery while it hums up to speed. You’ll scream in horror <sup>as</sup> you watch <sup>as</sup> they prepare the instruments which will turn you into their serving robot. And then the mad scientist will approach you as you continue to struggle in your bounds, and he will make his maniacal laugh -”

“Stop right there. Don’t you think this is a bit too much? Your story line reeks of a bad black and white movie. And what’s all this about a sack of cash for the orphans on ‘a dark and stormy night’ <sup>W</sup>who are you kidding?” Jessica looked into the rearview mirror to check her eye shadow. ✓

“When I’m written into a story, I expect to be treated right. After all, I go the trouble of dressing

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for the part, doing my hair and makeup, getting into the right frame of mind ... Some date this has turned out to be."

"You're forgetting something; you're not real. I made you up out of my imagination. And you're going to do exactly what I tell you to. And right now I'm telling you to go up to that house, ring the doorbell and ask to use the phone."

pick one

"No way, I'm not doing anything of the kind. What kind of dumb blonde do you take me for?"

"It's the only way you can proceed. I've written you into a tight situation. You have to go up the house if you want to move this story along."

"I'll see about that!" Jessica said as she fumbled in her handbag for her phone. She pressed 9-1-1. "Hello, I'd like to report a case of bad writing." ✓

fumbling

"I see, <sup>W</sup>where are you now, ma'am," the dispatcher said. <sup>?</sup>ashed.

"I'm in front of a spooky old house. The sign says 'Dr. Zacharia Zum, taxidermist and mad scientist'."

"I know where that is. Have you gone into the house yet?"

"No."

"Good. We advice that you don't. And your car is disabled?"

weird description

"Yes it is."

use "breakdown"

> but could be bad writing

"Out of gas, or a flat?"



"Out of gas."

"Yes, you certainly are a victim of bad writing. We'll send an officer by with a can of gas.

And for what it's worth, the Zum place has been slated for destruction years ago. It's old and cliché, and isn't used in today's modern stories. It's only standing because of the county's budget

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Sve

issues. Stay in the car, and if the writer tries to get fresh with you, like sending down a space monster or werewolf, call us back. The patrol car should be there in a few minutes.”

“Thanks, I’ll be waiting.” Jessica clicked off the phone.

“Are you happy now?”

“Happier than I was.”

“Because now there’s no story.”

“Sorry about ruining your plot. But, I’m not changing my mind.”

“Then, I think there’s just one more thing I need to write.”

“What’s that?”

The End. ✓ good ending

###

## SHORT STORY: DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

Ray

It was a dark and stormy night as Jessica Snow drove along the treacherous curves of Highway Thirteen. Or rather, she hoped she was still on Highway Thirteen. At 10:00 P.M she had veered off the interstate to take, what she thought, was a shortcut through the mountains. With the pounding of the rain, she wasn't sure if she missed the road sign and was driving along some back road leading to who-knows-where. It was now one minute to midnight, and her worst fears were true, she was way off course heading in the wrong direction as the lightning storm intensified.

She glanced at the passenger seat and the sack of cash. Hers was a heroic mission, a mission for the children at the orphanage. She'd picked up the money earlier in the evening, nearly one hundred thousand dollars, from a reclusive benefactor. She had to deliver it to the bank by 9:00 A.M. The benefactor was from out of state, the bank was in the city. Should she be late, the bank would foreclose on the orphanage, leaving sixty children without a roof over their heads.

"Oh brother!" she said as another bolt of lightning struck somewhere ahead. For a moment it was light enough to see the entire landscape. ~~But there was n~~ Not that there was much to see. ~~Tree's, with branches reached out like gnarled fingers, reached down~~ from either side of the road. With the wind whipping them, they seemed to beckon to her:

"Come, steer to us, ~~crash your ear here!~~ just a little swerve ..."

She drove on, ~~not heeding~~ ignoring them, clutching the steering wheel until her knuckles turned white.

Then it happened, the engine stalled as is ~~inevitably the case~~ always happens in stories like this. A glance at the instrument panel told her the ~~whole~~ story: she was out of gas! How could she have been so foolish as to not fill up when she turned of the interstate.

Page : 1 Line : 2 Author : Ray Benjamin 12/12/2014

There are several places in the text where the writer hasn't used the past perfect tense when it should be used, or has used it incorrectly. Past Perfect, or Pluperfect, is tricky. It's worth taking the time to review it from time to time.

Page : 1 Line : 6 Author : Ray Benjamin 12/12/2014

The phrasing of this sentence is awkward. Try something like: The rain was pounding so hard the racket made it hard to concentrate. She worried she'd missed the road sign and was driving along some back road leading who-knows-where.

Page : 1 Line : 21 Author : Ray Benjamin 12/12/2014

Tell us how the engine dies. Does it sputter? Does it just stop? Is there a calamitous cacophony?

Page : 1 Line : 23 Author : Ray Benjamin 12/12/2014

At this point I wondered, why no low fuel light?

## SHORT STORY: DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

Jessica rolled her eyes.

She coasted until she found a safe place to pull over on the narrow curvy road. It was a driveway carved between the trees. Houses were few and far between so she should consider herself lucky for this find. POV

“Yeah, real lucky,” she said in disbelief over this entire situation.

Another strike of lightning illuminated a wrought iron gate crossing the drive. Beyond that, at about a hundred feet up was an Victorian house. The gate was slightly ajar and there was a light on in one of the house’s upstairs window.

~~She reached to the back seat and grabbed her rain poncho and a flashlight from the back seat.~~  
It was late but she hoped whoever was home would understand and let her call for road service and perhaps let her wait out the storm. She ~~slipped~~struggled into her rain gear and ~~prepared herself to make a mad~~made ready to dash to the front door.

“Hold on, wait a second,” she said before jumping out. She took the flashlight and trained it ~~on~~ the imposing wrought iron gate. There was a sign on it. “Ah, ha!” She tried to make out the words.

~~It~~ read: “Dr. Zacharia Zum, Taxidermist.”

Knowing now who awaited her, Jessica ~~prepared herself for that dash to the house~~started to open the door.

“But wait, there’s more,” she said, flashlight still on the sign, “another smaller line of print, it says ... ‘and mad scientist’.”

Deciding it must be a word choice flavor of local humor, yet one more time, Jessica ~~prepared herself for that dash to the house.~~ She opened the car door — and stopped.

Page : 2 Line : 27 Author : Ray Benjamin 12/12/2014  
This appears to be a kind of POV shift. Who is thinking this?

Page : 2 Line : 30 Author : Ray Benjamin 12/12/2014  
A hundred feet up in altitude?

Page : 2 Line : 34 Author : Ray Benjamin 12/12/2014  
Putting on rain coats in the car isn't easy.

Page : 2 Line : 43 Author : Ray Benjamin 12/12/2014  
At this point, I wonder who she's supposed to be speaking to.



## SHORT STORY: DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

"You must be crazy if you think I'm going in there! I'm waiting right here. I've got my cell phone, I've got Triple A, and I'll stay here until road service arrives."

"No, you're going up to that house and ringing the doorbell. The mad scientist and his Igor type assistant are peering at you already from the belfry window. They've got everything prepared for an exciting story."

"I'm not moving from this spot!"

"You have too."

"Uh uh. No way, no how. I'm not going up there. Who knows what kind of situation I'd be getting myself into."

"Let me explain something to you. I'm the writer, and you're the character. It's my job to put you into inescapable predicaments. And using your wits and the meager resources I throw permit at you, you'll overcome adversity and emerge out victorious in the end. But, before that, you'll shall be chased around by the mad scientist and his equally mad insect-snacking assistant. Of course, they'll eventually catch you, and when they do, they'll tie you up in chains down in their dungeon."

"And As you're tied there struggling to break free of your bounds, you're going to watch as the mad scientist prepares some bubbling concoction made of a disgustingly green fluid. Then you're going to look on in horror as Igor turns on a giant machine by throwing a monster sized knife switch on the wall. You'll get to hear as the electricity will crackle as it courses through the machinery while it hums spins up to speed. You'll scream look on in horror, as you watch as the mad duo prepare the instruments which they'll use to will turn you into their docile serving robot. And Then the mad scientist will approach you, laughing maniacally, as you continue to struggle in your <sup>bounds</sup> ~~bounds~~, and he will make his maniacal laugh."

Page : 3 Line : 50 Author : Ray Benjamin 12/12/2014

At this point, the jig is up, so why be coy? Introduce this character as the writer.

Page : 3 Line : 57 Author : Ray Benjamin 12/12/2014

I'd dramatically shorten the preview of the cliché collection she's facing. Trust your reader to get it and move on.

Page : 3 Line : 62 Author : Ray Benjamin 12/12/2014

Disgustingly is an adverb, not an adjective.

## SHORT STORY: DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

“Stop right there. Don’t you think this is a bit too much? Your story line reeks of a bad black and white movie. And what’s all this about a sack of cash for the orphans on ‘a dark and stormy night’, who are you kidding?” Jessica looked into the ~~rear view~~~~rearview~~ mirror to check her eye shadow. “When I’m written into a story, I expect to be treated right. After all, I go the trouble of dressing for the part, doing my hair and makeup, getting into the right frame of mind ... Some date this has turned out to be.”

“You’re forgetting something, you’re not real. I made you up out of my imagination. And you’re going to do exactly what I tell you to do. And Right now I’m telling you to go up to that house, ring the doorbell and ask to use the phone.”

“No way, I’m not doing anything of the kind. What kind of dumb blonde do you take me for?”

“It’s the only way you can proceed. I’ve written you into a tight situation. You have to go up the house if you want to move this story along.”

“I’ll see about that!” Jessica said as she fumbled in her handbag for her phone. She pressed 9-1-1. “Hello, I’d like to report a case of bad writing.”

“I see, where are you now, ma’am,” the dispatcher said.

“I’m in front of a spooky old house. The sign says ‘Dr. Zacharia Zum, taxidermist and mad scientist’.”

“I know where that is. Have you gone into the house yet?”

“No.”

“Good. We ~~advise~~~~advise~~ that you don’t. And y>Your car is disabled?”

“Yes it is.”

“Out of gas, or a flat?”

Page : 4 Line : 72 Author : Ray Benjamin 12/12/2014  
Better, a breath of freshness

Page : 4 Line : 74 Author : Ray Benjamin 12/12/2014  
When did this turn into a date?

Page : 4 Line : 89 Author : Ray Benjamin 12/12/2014  
Quit starting every dialog sentence with “And ...,” especially when it's a character other than the writer, who seems to have that habit.

## SHORT STORY: DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

“Out of gas.”

“Yes, you certainly are a victim of bad writing. We’ll send an officer by with a can of gas. And for what it’s worth, the Zum place has been slated for destruction ~~years ago~~for years. It’s an old ~~and~~ cliché, and isn’t used in today’s modern stories. It’s only standing because of the county’s budget issues. Stay in the car, and if the writer tries to get fresh with you, like sending ~~down in~~ a space monster or werewolf, call us back. The patrol car should be there in a few minutes.”

“Thanks, I’ll be waiting.” Jessica clicked off the phone.

“Are you happy now?”

“Happier than I was.”

“Because now there’s no story.”

“Sorry about ruining your plot. But, I’m not changing my mind.”

“Then, I think there’s just one more thing I need to write.”

“What’s that?”

The End.

[Comments]

The story is cute, but I think we need to get a hint of the originality earlier in the story. After just a few paragraphs I was starting to skim in the hope something interesting would happen.

This story needs something early that will get us to hang on until the story picks up.

I found several places where a simple phrase would work as well or better than what was written. In most cases, my suggestions use fewer words. As always, these are suggestions and the writer has to decide if they are worth using or not.

Page : 5 Line : 93 Author : Ray Benjamin 12/12/2014

It could be a burned out imagination coil or failure of the standards regulator.

## SHORT STORY: DAMSEL IN DISTRESS

Readers are smart. It's pretty obvious what the idea behind the story is the first time the "writer" makes his/her appearance. so don't be coy about it. There isn't much to gain and the last thing you need is more confusion.