



35 Opening Sentences from Novels

My banged-up spoon scrapes the bottom of a barrel that should've held enough dried beans to last for three more months.

~ *Woven in Moonlight*, Isabel Ibañez

When I got to work that Monday morning I knew something was wrong.

~ *A Little Yellow Dog*, Walter Mosely

“Have you anything to say for yourself?”

~ *Blanche on the Lam*, Barbara Neely

After a year of slavery in the Salt Mines of Endovier, Celaena Sardothien was accustomed to being escorted everywhere in shackles and at sword-point.

~ *Throne of Glass*, Sarah J. Maas

The Swede.

~ *American Pastoral*, Philip Roth

He drives alongside the small streambed, and the terrible shitscape looms up by increments—upturned buckets by the bend in the river, a broken baby carriage in the weeds, a petrol drum leaking out a dried tongue of rust, the carcass of a fridge in the brambles.

~ *Zoli*, Colum McCann

Last night I dreamed of Ursula DeVane.

~ *The Finishing School*, Gail Godwin

I'm pretty much fucked.

~ *The Martian*, Andy Weir

I remember lying in the snow, a small red spot of warm going cold, surrounded by wolves.

~ *Shiver*, Maggie Stiefvater

It stopped me dead in my tracks.

~ *L'Origine*, Lilianne Milgrom

Gina Ferrari didn't want to go, but she knew she couldn't stay.

~ *Five Things*, Lynne Marino

The terror, which would not end for another twenty-eight years—if it ever did end—began, so far as I know or can tell, with a boat made from a sheet of newspaper floating down a gutter swollen with rain.

~ *It*, Stephen King

One of the very first bullets comes in through the open window above the toilet where Luca is standing.

~ *American Dirt*, Jeanine Cummins

What about a teakettle?

~ *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, Jonathan Safran Foer

He had thought that watching a movie would agreeably distract him, but the images unspooling on the tiny screen and the tinny sound coming through the headphones were an irritant, like an inexperienced touch between a tickle and a scratch.

~ *All I Love and Know*, Judith Frank

The heart attack was strange—fear is strange.

~ *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, James Baldwin

It took me a long time and most of the world to learn what I know about love and fate and the choices we make, but the heart of it came to me in an instant, while I was chained to a wall and being tortured.

~ *Shantaram*, Gregory David Roberts

The day she walked the streets of Silk, a chafing wind kept the temperature low and the sun was helpless to move outdoor thermometers more than a few degrees above freezing.

~ *Love*, Toni Morrison

On a sticky August evening two weeks before her due date, Ashima Ganguli stands in the kitchen of a Central Square apartment, combining Rice Krispies and Planters peanuts and chopped red onion in a bowl.

~ *The Namesake*, Jhumpa Lahiri

“Where’s Papa going with that axe?” said Fern to her mother as they were setting the table for breakfast.

~ *Charlotte’s Web*, E.B. White

There was, as it turned out, no train to the village where the Chagalls lived: one of the many complications he’d failed to anticipate.

~ *The Flight Portfolio*, Julie Orringer

Everyone thought he was dead.

~ *The Book of Illusions*, Paul Auster

The following day, no one died.

~ *Death with Interruptions*, José Saramago

Today I’m five.

~ *Room*, Emma Donoghue

Harriet was trying to explain to Sport how to play Town.

~ *Harriet the Spy*, Louise Fitzhugh

In later years, holding forth to an interviewer or to an audience of aging fans at a comic book convention, Sam Clay liked to declare, apropos of his and Joe Kavalier's greatest creation, that back when he was a boy, sealed and hog-tied inside the airtight vessel known as Brooklyn, New York, he had been haunted by dreams of Harry Houdini.

~ *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay*, Michael Chabon

Strapped into the quivering soup can laughingly called a plane, bouncing his way on the pummeling air through the stingy window of light that was winter, through the gaps and breaks in the snow-sheathed mountains toward a town called Lunacy, Ignatious Burke had an epiphany.

~ *Northern Lights*, Nora Roberts

On a wet summer night, Danny Coughlin, a Boston police officer, fought a four-round bout against another cop, Johnny Green, at Mechanics Hall just outside Copley Square.

~ *The Given Day*, Dennis Lehane

We came from Bethlehem, Georgia, bearing Betty Crocker cake mixes into the jungle.

~ *The Poisonwood Bible*, Barbara Kingsolver

On the morning the last Lisbon daughter took her turn at suicide—it was Mary this time, and sleeping pills, like Therese—the two paramedics arrived at the house knowing exactly where the knife drawer was, and the gas oven, and the beam in the basement from which it was possible to tie a rope.

~ *The Virgin Suicides*, Jeffrey Eugenides

I am doomed to remember a boy with a wrecked voice—not because of his voice, or because he was the smallest person I ever knew, or even because he was the instrument of my mother's death, but because he is the reason I believe in God; I am a Christian because of Owen Meany.

~ *A Prayer for Owen Meany*, John Irving

You better not never tell nobody but God.

~ *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker

When Mr. Bilbo Baggins of Bag End announced that he would shortly be celebrating his eleventy-first birthday with a party of special magnificence, there was much talk and excitement in Hobbiton.

~ *The Fellowship of the Ring*, J.R.R. Tolkein

The island of Gont, a single mountain that lifts its peak a mile above the storm-racked Northeast Sea, is a land famous for wizards.

~ *A Wizard of Earthsea*, Ursula K. Le Guin

Everyone my age remembers where they were and what they were doing when they first heard about the contest.

~ *Ready Player One*, Ernest Kline