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Don't tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass.

— Anton Chekhov

Writing Warm-up

Set a timer for three minutes and wherever you are sitting right now, begin to look around at your surroundings and describe what you see, hear, taste, smell, and feel. Describe your experience of the place so thoroughly that the reader feels like they are right there with you.

Writing Samples

1.

Trees stretched over the roof that had almost as many holes as shingles. Window glass was missing at various spots; a sapling was growing up through an opening in the front porch, and wild sumac clung to the splintered porch rails. The front door was hanging by a single nail; in fact it had been tied back so that the door always stood open. A horseshoe was nailed over the doorway, for luck...

From: *Wishing You Well* by David Baldacci

2.

On a turquoise towel, clean dishes are stacked in a neat pile to the left of the kitchen sink: pink plastic pet food bowls, a clear glass saucer, a vintage aluminum juicer, signs of the morning's doings. A clutter of colored glass frames the window sill and a collection of glass dangles above the sink: a ruby teardrop, an amber light shade. Cuttings from the Devil's tooth ivy, the Dragon's Blood, and the Snake Plant root there too while the dim winter light slowly spins the solar globe sitting on the sill. Plants, brought in since the freeze, line the walls and the entire surface of the antique gate-legged table, a miniature Poinsettia, crimson and bright, claims the centerpiece of this profusion of green. The smell of tangerine, freshly squeezed, spices the warm, dry air; the heater hums, while the soft snores of the brown Chihuahua and the gray tabby cat echo each other like a round.

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Writing Exercise

- 1) Reach into your memory bank and describe a place you find there: a local hang out, a room in your family home, your childhood backyard, your neighborhood, a special vacation spot, your grandfather's garden, a place you've hiked or camped, a small town main street, or any other interesting place you remember.
- 2) If you're game, take a day-trip to a local place of interest and while you're there, find a spot to sit and write a description of your surroundings. You can also do this at a local restaurant or coffee shop. Just pop out your journal and write! While these writing samples focus on the description of place, it is hard not to also notice and describe the characters that inhabit the space you are describing. But, try to focus specifically on place, then, if you still have energy, pop the characters into the scene with detailed descriptions of their appearance and actions. During this exercise, you may also record dialogue of interest that you happen to overhear.
- 3) Try writing a short story or piece of micro-fiction or memoir, using your description(s) of place as the setting.

Food for Thought

Think of this kind of writing as making deposits in your fodder bank, meaning, later, these scenes may appear in a story or poem. Also, think of this kind of practice as increasing your observation skills while honing your craft. It may be fun to keep a small journal or recording device handy as you go through your days, recording descriptions of place as you inhabit them.