

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Writing Prompt: The Refuge

Charity Hume · Wednesday, May 28th, 2014

Charity Hume with this week's writing prompt. Write on!

One of my favorite “war stories” was written by Tim O’Brien, in a collection called *The Things They Carried*. A veteran of the Vietnam War, O’Brien’s narrator recalls the decision to enlist, and his desire to run away from the draft.

In a beautiful story told from the point of view of a scared teenager, he describes his flight from his hometown as the draft deadline nears. He finds a safe haven in an out of the way motel run by an old man with an unusual understanding and wisdom. The teenager is on the brink of an escape to Canada, considering the life of an exile from his family, his country, his past. The refuge offered in the three or four days with the motel owner creates a world where we see the pause between flight and action. These days provide us with a window into the internal choice the character has to make. We live in that refuge knowing that the clock is ticking, and the tension builds as we know that the character needs to act.

Create a situation for a character who finds a safe place, a sanctuary that protects him or her in a difficult situation. When you start, begin with people, places, activities in your own life where you have found this refuge, and describe the haven they provided in detail. What were you hiding from? What did this person give you that no one else could? Perhaps the refuge was a solitary escape, and if so, give the physical details of the solace it provided. When you begin with material from your memory, it is very likely you will discover the seeds for a story that will yield rich, personal material that no one but you can write.



The Hut at Trouville, Low Tide, by Claude Monet, (1881), courtesy of Wikipaintings

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