**The Red Barn – Writing Inspiration – “Describing Exercise”**

John Gardner, in The Art of Fiction: Notes on Craft for Young Writers, outlines the following exercise: “Describe a barn as seen by a man whose son has just been killed in a war. Do not mention the son, war, or death. Do not mention the man who does the seeing.”

We can use a version of this which is a little more fun and builds up our scene over time, adding elements to build up a strong picture without using exposition.

**EXERCISE ONE:**

Describe a red barn. You must not use the word red (or any synonyms of red – I see you, Miss Scarlet!). From reading about the barn, I should be able to tell you the colour of it. For example, does the barn blend into the sunset sky? Does the colour of the barn remind the narrator of something – jam, or even blood? Set a timer for yourself of 10 minutes and see how far you get. Go!

**EXERCISE TWO:**

That wasn’t so bad, was it? Now we need to add a narrative to our description. You may have already done that when trying to match the colour to a memory for your narrator. That was a good warm up, but now we are getting serious!

Below I’ve made a table similar to ones you see online created purely for procrastination reasons. And who doesn’t love procrastination?! So I’ve repurposed this one to work for our writing.

Finding your birth month, birth date, and favourite colour on each line should give you a character and emotion that character is feeling. So, seeing as I’m born on November 19th, I would be an excited thief!

Now, rewrite your piece about the red barn, without mentioning the colour of the barn, from the point of view of your new character, *without telling us who they are and how they feel.* So for example, does a chef see everything as a potential ingredient? Is he excited, because he is opening a new restaurant? Find a reason why your character, possibly a confused detective, is there. Is he there to solve a murder, but can’t remember how he got there? The back story should tell the reader the colour of the barn; the occupation of the person, and how they are feeling. No “A happy teacher stumbled across a red barn” allowed!

Set another timer and write, or brainstorm ideas if you find that easier, for twenty minutes. What did you come up with? As always, any questions, come and bug me on twitter: @melliver.

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| Birth Month | Character | Birth Date | Emotion |
| January | Detective | 1-2 | Happy |
| February | Teacher | 3-5 | Sad |
| March | Farmer | 6-8 | Angry |
| April | Soldier | 9-11 | Scared |
| May | Dog | 12-14 | Shocked |
| June | Mother | 15-17 | Afraid |
| July | Teenager | 18-20 | Excited |
| August | Spy | 21-23 | Jealous |
| September | The Prime Minister | 24-26 | In Love |
| October | Doctor | 27-29 | Embarrassed |
| November | Thief | 30 | Confused |
| December | Chef | 31 | Worried |