

How I Met My Wife

My goal is this short descriptive piece is to create a mood. What is that mood? How did I create it? Of the hundreds of details I could have chosen, why did I include just these?

Here is sensory language – the sights, sounds and smells of a busy day ending. I've chosen these details as a comparison, to show how she and I are somehow strangely removed, separate ...

Yet she is part of the artistic backdrop.

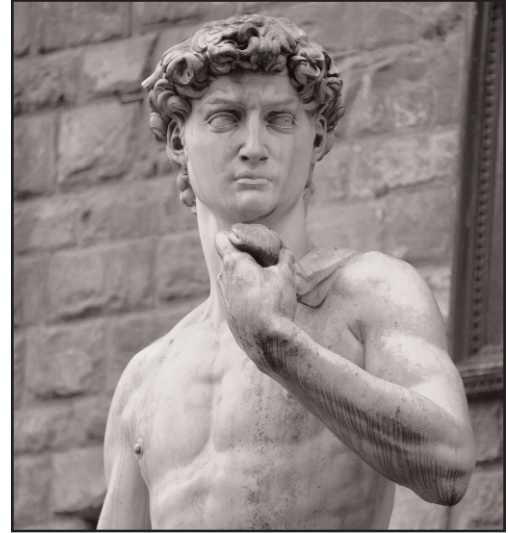
More details to suggest we are aloof from the crowd.

Using figurative language like similes adds depth: here I want to place a rich value on what is happening to me.

Some descriptions can extend into possible metaphors that suggest a larger meaning.

Why the threatening quality to this description?

Ernest Hemingway said that the proper names of things have a simple elegance and purity to them: San Marco Square, Arno, El Duomo. Though you might not know what these are, do they conjure up images? Do they create a mood?



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After spending much of the afternoon in the Academia looking at the Michelangelo sculptures, I sat down on a park bench in San Marco Square. Businesses were letting out. Streetcars packed with frenzied riders clanged along the busy boulevard. Electricity singed the air. The zinc bars began to fill. I decided to read my book for a while, then wander into one of the cafés for a cappuccino. I liked the whooshing sound the steam machine made. I liked the way the cinnamon turned rich dark brown. I liked the smell of the leather shops on the Ponte Vecchio. I liked everything about Florence. I'd traveled there from Vienna where I was a student.

"You're American, aren't you?" she said. "Would you like to go to a party?" I looked up to where she was backlit by the fading mauve daylight. Her heavy hair fell to her waist like a Renaissance tapestry. She wore pressed jeans and a navy blue blazer.

She led me through alleyways so narrow we walked single file. She was American too, studying art. She said I looked lonely. Her apartment spread across the top floor of a sagging yellow building in an ancient part of the city. Inside hippies were cooking brown rice, so we escaped to the balcony that overlooked the orange tiled rooftops and clay chimney pots. Red geraniums exploded from window boxes. In the courtyard below the leaves on the poplar trees spun like gold coins.

"We could go dancing," she shrugged.

We stopped first at her favorite place overlooking the Arno. When I told her she had pretty hands she unfolded her long, caked, cracked sculptor's fingers and laughed. By then the sky was stained deep purple. A slow barge with red lamps churned against a current as relentless and certain as time.

The disco was crowded with small boned men in dark suits. One tipped into her, gesticulating in Italian.

"We're married," I told him in German and he backed away.

When we went back to her apartment her roommates had gone. I stepped outside. A translucent moon wavered over the darkened roofs the way it had for a thousand years. Her bedroom overlooked the balcony. We talked through the open shuttered window. She sat cross-legged on a straw mattress brushing her hair. Her knees were the color of almonds. The Florentine night glowed pink from El Duomo's light.