

Writers Workshop #6 Skeletons in the Closet, Mold in the Fridge

I love visiting new friends' homes for the first time and seeing what kinds of furniture, art, knickknacks, and other stuff they surround themselves with. Unlike most people, however, I don't like to stop with the easily visible items. As a writer, I want to know how—or if—they organize their kitchen and bathroom cabinets, what condition are the bedroom closets in, and what's in all those boxes in the basement and garage? If the person I'm visiting lives in a tiny apartment, where only the most critical belongings can fit, what has he or she chosen to keep? What might they have had to get rid of? And what do all these things—the Jimi Hendrix photo ripped out of a 1969 Rolling Stone Magazine taped onto the wall by the toilet, the container of green moldy goo in the back of the refrigerator, the half-full wine glass with lipstick marks on the balcony floor—what do they mean? What do they say about the person living in that place?

Writing exercise: Pretend that you or a character (Character #1) you create are looking into another character's (Character #2) refrigerator or closet or cabinet. What do you see? What do the contents say to you about Character #1? What feelings, thoughts, or memories about Character #2 do those things evoke in you or in Character #1?

Variations:

- Instead of using a refrigerator, closet, or cabinet, you can use Character #2's car, bedroom, kitchen, desk, or school locker—any one frequently used space where he/she keeps personal belongings.
- Once you've chosen the place and the character, let yourself free write with this exercise. See what wacky items turn up in that closet or car, and then imagine what Character #2 might be doing with them.
- Let Character #2 visit *your* closet, cabinet, fridge, or car—that one cluttered and murky space you never wanted him/her to see. And then you arrive just as he/she finds the one thing you desperately didn't want him/her to find.
- Pretend Character #2 is your parent (if you are a teen) or your child (if you are an adult).

Have fun!