



The Perfect Place to Write

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I'D LIKE TO START with a bid for my perfect place to write, hoping that some random millionaire will hear this missive and give it to me for free. So, here goes: my perfect place to write would be in a warm, cosy cabin in the mountains of Switzerland in the winter surrounded by snow. There's something wonderful about writing when there's snow. It deadens sound and blankets everything with clean lines. It clears out the mind and makes the world a hushed, waiting space to fill with words. It hardly ever happens here on the east coast of the UK, of course, so this is a true fantasy. But I can clearly remember the few occasions where I happened to be writing at my desk when it snowed and I'm convinced the writing I did on those days was better than rain, cloud or worse, sunshine. Sunny days are the pits of writing. I just can't concentrate with all the glowing going on outside. I'm not a fan of hot weather either, so it just feels oppressive. Snow, on the other hand, is my ideal. (Millionaires take note. Oh and by the way, I'd need a well-stocked fridge and endless firewood too, thanks.)

So, without snow, what can I do to provide my perfect writing conditions? The truth is, all I need is a bit of quiet. Even then, I've been known to write some cracking stuff in a noisy café or on the train. I've even written a kick-ass farewell scene that actually made me cry at the exact same time my daughter was shouting quizzes at me from another room: multitasker extraordinaire that day. Weirdly, you *can* compartmentalise your brain into the writing bit and be aware of your chaotic environment bit. But ideally, I must say, I like a quiet house, preferably empty or generally at my desk (so I don't get crippling neck ache later by hunching over in bed



or on the sofa). The quiet is important because it allows my mind to open itself up and fill with story stuff. It's not impossible to do this elsewhere but it's much easier for me in a quiet house. I also rarely have music on when I'm drafting. I often have it on when researching or planning, or even have the television on in the background, often with costume dramas set in the same period I'm writing about, to feel I'm immersed in the world I'm trying to inhabit, providing a kind of deep texture to the historical writing. But when I'm drafting I prefer silence. If it's winter or an otherwise cool day, I often have a fleece on, plus a heated blanket over my legs, as well as fingerless arthritis gloves that keep my hands warm as I type (not a sexy image, I know, but who says I need to be sexy when I'm writing? Stuff that idea!) I try to stand up regularly and have a stretch and a jig about, to reduce aches and pains later. There's usually a Sports Direct mug of cold tea on my desk too. None of this is perfect, but if the Swiss chalet ain't gonna happen (hurry up, random millionaire), my empty house with a blanket will have to suffice. And I'm about to start my ninth novel for publication, so I guess I must be doing something right.