**MODEL PLACE DESCRIPTIONS**

In each of the following paragraphs (the first written by a student, the rest by professional writers), the author uses precise descriptive details to evoke a distinctive mood as well as to convey a memorable picture.

1) The Laundry Room

The windows at either end of the laundry room were open, but no breeze washed through to carry off the stale odors of fabric softener, detergent, and bleach. In the small ponds of soapy water that stained the concrete floor were stray balls of multicolored lint and fuzz. Along the left wall of the room stood ten rasping dryers, their round windows offering glimpses of jumping socks, underwear, and fatigues. Down the center of the room were a dozen washing machines, set back to back in two rows. Some were chugging like steamboats; others were whining and whistling and dribbling suds. Two stood forlorn and empty, their lids flung open, with crudely drawn signs that said "Broke!" A long shelf partially covered in blue paper ran the length of the wall, interrupted only by a locked door. Alone, at the far end of the shelf, sat one empty laundry basket and an open box of Tide. Above the shelf at the other end was a small bulletin board decorated with yellowed business cards and torn slips of paper: scrawled requests for rides, reward offers for lost dogs, and phone numbers without names or explanations. On and on the machines hummed and wheezed, gurgled and gushed, washed, rinsed, and spun.

2) Mabel's Lunch\*

Mabel's Lunch stood along one wall of a wide room, once a pool hall, with the empty cue racks along the back side. Beneath the racks were wire-back chairs, one of them piled with magazines, and between every third or fourth chair a brass spittoon. Near the center of the room, revolving slowly as if the idle air was water, a large propeller fan suspended from the pressed tin ceiling. It made a humming sound, like a telephone pole, or an idle, throbbing locomotive, and although the switch cord vibrated it was cluttered with flies. At the back of the room, on the lunch side, an oblong square was cut in the wall and a large woman with a soft, round face peered through at us. After wiping her hands, she placed her heavy arms, as if they tired her, on the shelf.

\* Adapted from a paragraph in The World in the Attic, by Wright Morris (Scribner's, 1949). 17

3) Subway Station\*

Standing in the subway station, I began to appreciate the place--almost to enjoy it. First of all, I looked at the lighting: a row of meager light bulbs, unscreened, yellow, and coated with filth, stretched toward the black mouth of the tunnel, as though it were a bolt hole in an abandoned coal mine. Then I lingered, with zest, on the walls and ceilings: lavatory tiles which had been white about fifty years ago, and were now encrusted with soot, coated with the remains of a dirty liquid which might be either atmospheric humidity mingled with smog or the result of a perfunctory attempt to clean them with cold water; and, above them, gloomy vaulting from which dingy paint was peeling off like scabs from an old wound, sick black paint leaving a leprous white undersurface. Beneath my feet, the floor a nauseating dark brown with black stains upon it which might be stale oil or dry chewing gum or some worse defilement: it looked like the hallway of a condemned slum building. Then my eye traveled to the tracks, where two lines of glittering steel--the only positively clean objects in the whole place--ran out of darkness into darkness above an unspeakable mass of congealed oil, puddles of dubious liquid, and a mishmash of old cigarette packets, mutilated and filthy newspapers, and the debris that filtered down from the street above through a barred grating in the roof.

\* Adapted from a paragraph in Talents and Geniuses, by Gilbert Highet (Oxford UP, 1957).

4) The Kitchen\*

The kitchen held our lives together. My mother worked in it all day long, we ate in it almost all meals except the Passover seder, I did my homework and first writing at the kitchen table, and in winter I often had a bed made up for me on three kitchen chairs near the stove. On the wall just over the table hung a long horizontal mirror that sloped to a ship's prow at each end and was lined in cherry wood. It took up the whole wall, and drew every object in the kitchen to itself. The walls were a fiercely stippled whitewash, so often rewhitened by my father in slack seasons that the paint looked as if it had been squeezed and cracked into the walls. A large electric bulb hung down the center of the kitchen at the end of a chain that had been hooked into the ceiling; the old gas ring and key still jutted out of the wall like antlers. In the corner next to the toilet was the sink at which we washed, and the square tub in which my mother did our clothes. Above it, tacked to the shelf on which were pleasantly ranged square, blue-bordered white sugar and spice jars, hung calendars from the Public National Bank on Pitkin Avenue and the Minsker Progressive Branch of the Workmen's Circle; receipts for the payment of insurance premiums, and household bills on a spindle; two little boxes engraved with Hebrew letters. One of these was for the poor, the other to buy back the Land of Israel. Each spring a bearded little man would suddenly appear in our kitchen, salute us with a hurried Hebrew blessing, empty the boxes (sometimes with a sidelong look of disdain if they were not full), hurriedly bless us again for remembering our less fortunate Jewish brothers and sisters, and so take his departure until the next spring, after vainly trying to persuade my mother to take still another box. We did occasionally remember to drop coins in the boxes, but this was usually only on the dreaded morning of "midterms" and final examinations, because my mother thought it would bring me luck.

\* Adapted from a paragraph in A Walker in the City, by Alfred Kazin (Harvest, 1969).