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Exercise: Changing Your Life, AKA "The Bandit's Story" (From Joy Nolan) Part I A
“As a writer of fiction, you have to be more loyal to the fiction than to the facts that inspire it.”

Part I. A

A. Choose a central dramatic incident from your life (autobiographical). Write about this event in the first person (I, me, mine). See if you can achieve some basic form, like a clear beginning, a middle, and an end.

There were two trees perched at the very top of this hill. The distance appeared short from below. An illusion of sorts. It made you eager and willing to climb up to get an even better view of the rolling landscape where tall swaths of green trees met the wrinkled earth that sloped into the blue waters of the bay. The city, with its golden entrance, still visible from afar. The three of us start walking up the path, leaving one of us behind. He was busy in conversation with a spiritual guide. Once we topped the first smaller hill, it quickly became apparent that the view would not come so easily. Two more small hills, down and up, then again once more. The two of us stood at the bottom of the last hill. The path was steep and rigid. The one of us lagged behind. The two of us decide to do what's sensible in this situation. We raced up the sharp dirt path. I was neck and neck with him, but my legs began to falter, and my lungs began to burn. This is where I blame it on my shoes. The one of us sat back, capturing us in a timelapse. We reached the summit in rapid fashion, just under thirty seconds time. Well, in reality, it was about three minutes. How long we sat up there by the two trees, we do not know.

Long enough to where, by the time we made it back down to Trojan Point, the one of us left behind had already shared their entire life story with each other.

Part II B

Stage the story in a radically different setting.

There's not enough time in the world to fully appreciate a beautiful moment. Time is my enemy. I want to be there, but it goes too slow. Time is my enemy. I want to stay there, but it goes too fast. The clock tower represented this paradox well. It also offered some of the best views of the old town. The four of us were tasked with going into town to trade some wool for essential supplies to take back to our village. My friend was to go off on a voyage east soon after we get back to the village. We've grown up together, making runs to the village together all our lives. We all loved coming into town. Many different people from all around the region gathered here to trade anything and everything. It was vibrant and full of life. The sand-washed cobblestoned streets diverged sporadically throughout the maze of buildings. Eventually converging to a large commons, where just north stood the clock tower. Going up the clock tower without authorization was prohibited, especially for outsiders like us. After all the day's tasks were completed, my friend soon realized our time together was fast fleeting. He came to me to suggest the same thing I was thinking while looking up at the clock. We always wanted to see the town from the top. Without hesitation, I agreed.

From the outside, it did not look too difficult. There was just one measly lock on the door and stairs inside. We told the other two we would be right back and to simply stay put. One of the two had no complaints; he was busy in conversation with a mystical woman from a faraway land. The other one of the two groveled but agreed nonetheless.

We had a lock pick for when certain situations were to warrant one, but the rusty old lock came off with one swift hit from a rock. The trek up seemed easy at first, but soon, the stairs seemed to continuously degrade the higher we climbed. We were halfway up when I made the mistake of looking down. Heights always seem to double while looking down. My knees began to lock, my legs began to falter, my breath began to labor, and my heart began to race. My friend was unphased. He continued upward. His poise gave me no added confidence but willed me up the last leg nonetheless.

There we sat, up atop the clock tower, looking out onto the town. The sprawling maze of orange roofing reached out for miles, blending into the countryside. We could even see the bay from here, sparkling in a faded blue. At first, I could hear the tick of the clock measuring the passage of time. Though, it eventually faded. I was absorbed into the moment. Time was not relevant. How long we sat up there, we did not know. It was long enough for the one of the other two to trade life stories with that mystical woman and for the other one of the two to fall asleep on a bale of hay.