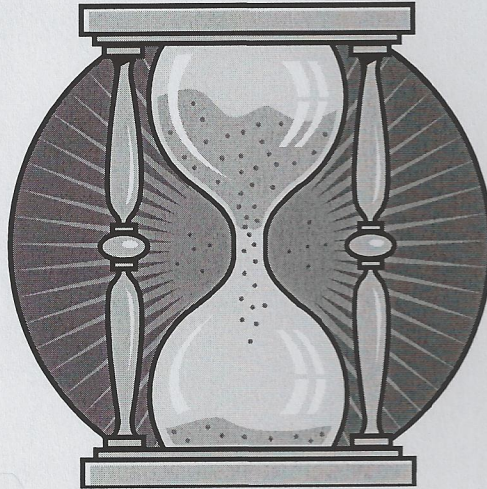


Explode a Moment Playing with Time



“Time to a writer is like play dough in the hands of a toddler.”

Barry Lane

Writing is different from real life. We can spend multiple pages describing one moment. Think about the most significant moment from your story. It could have lasted a few seconds or a few minutes. Brainstorm this moment and explode it.

I watched myself begin this horrible deed. My hand seemed to suddenly have a will of its own. It picked up the milk carton. The spout was already open. My arm extended over Carol's head, tipping the carton. The liquid poured in slow, steady thick unending stream down through her long blonde hair, soaking the back of her clothes and running onto the floor. As the milk reached the floor I shifted the spout slightly to begin another long milky journey down the front of her. It poured over her forehead, in the eyes, running in rivers down each side of her nose, converging on the chin and splashing into her plate. Her food was soon awash and the milk poured over the edge, and ran into her lap. And still I poured on—it was too late to stop now. The rapture of it all. Oh, sweet revenge.

Carol was shocked into absolute silence, her milk-washed eyes staring at me in total disbelief—almost uncomprehending. What had I done? I only meant to pour a little to scare her and now it was all over—everywhere. Her chair was a four-legged island in the middle of a giant white pond in the kitchen floor. How could one quart of milk go so far? For a second or two she didn't react and I had a brief but fleeting prayer that she was stunned speechless. However, not for long.

"Daddeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!" she screamed at the top of her lungs. The sound of cocktail glasses being knocked over the coffee table in the living room and my father charging around the corner happened almost simultaneously. In an instant he took in the whole scene. Horrible big sister pours milk over innocent little sister's head. I simply couldn't have looked much worse. It didn't take any smarts to realize that. I knew there was no way of explaining my way out of this one. "Guilty" was the immediate verdict of the judge. My mother, the long since powerless "jury" of one, as usual, did not interfere.

Fifth grader Isaac Mayo exploded the moment before he jumped off the high dive for the first time. Notice how his careful observation adds to the suspense:

The first dive

My hand trembled as it touched the cold metal of the ladder. I looked up and it seemed the ladder would never end. I raised my left foot and as it touched the first rung, the step shifted and squeaked under my weight. I lifted my right foot and set it down next to the first. Together they slowly warmed the metal platform underneath them. I shivered at the thought of what I was about to do. I raised up my left foot and began the long slow climb, one cold, squeaky step after another. Finally at the top, I looked out at the vast expanse of water in front of me. Carefully, I inched my feet forward along the bumpy road of fiberglass. Reaching the end of the board, I thought about the fact that I was 15 feet above the surface of the water! I must be crazy! I decided I had to do it. Gently, I started to bounce a little, just letting the board vibrate under my feet. Soon, my feet began to leave the bumpy surface of fiberglass for a fraction of a second each time I sprang my knees. With each bounce the distance grew greater as the board pushed up under my feet. Suddenly, I was in flight and at the apex of my jump, I thrust my body out away from the board. My eyes were squeezed shut and I wondered when I would hit the water. The wind was hitting my face and then suddenly it was the clean, coolness of the water. It washed over my body as I glided through its

There was a crashing of bush and a low, snarling growl. An immense paw reached through the thicket and tumbled the cub over and out of sight. In its place loomed a huge brown shape. Bursting through the leaves was a head three times as big as the cubs. No curiosity in those small eyes, only an angry reddish gleam.

Somehow Matt had the sense not to run. He stood frozen on the path. A bear could overtake a running man in a few bounds. And this one was only two bounds away. The bear's head moved slowly from side to side. Its heavy body brushed aside the branches as though they were cobwebs. It swayed, shifting its weight from one foot to the other. Slowly it rose on its hind legs. Matt could see the wicked curving claws.

Matt would never know why he acted as he did. He could not remember thinking at all, only staring with numb horror at the creature about to charge. Somehow he did move. He swung the dead rabbit by its ears and hurled it at the bear's head. The tiny body struck the bear squarely on the nose. With a jerk of the head the bear shook it off as though it were a buzzing mosquito. The rabbit flopped useless to the ground. The bear did not even bother to look down at it. (1983, pp. 72-73)

I could feel my cheeks flush red with embarrassment. I reached down and picked up the bat. It was cold in my hands. I looked up at the stands and I could see my father cheering. He was thrusting his fist up in the air and shouting something I couldn't understand. I looked at the pitcher. The ball was moving up and out of his glove following his hand in one fluid motion. I swung before it was halfway there. 'Stee-rike,' the empire shouted. . . .