Cultural Daily

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Writing Prompt: The Turning Point

Charity Hume · Wednesday, April 16th, 2014

This week's writing prompt from Charity Hume

I remember hearing William Styron, the American novelist, speak at a dinner in New York; the phrase I most remember from his talk has stayed with me: "A novel is a progress toward an event, after which nothing will ever be the same again." A turning point reverses the previous world, and gives you a whole new identity. It burns up your past in a conflagration of everything you've ever known. To go on, you must forget who you were. That's a turning point. No way back.

Create a protagonist who faces a dramatic change, a place where nothing that worked in the previous world has any meaning any more. Think of turning points from novels, plays and films you've enjoyed in the past. What is the turning point for that protagonist? What scene? What moment? What forces are at work? A turning point can be revealed in stunned silence: a woman who thinks she rules the world is faced with a diagnosis of breast cancer; a star student is caught cheating on an examination; a child discovers his father's business is corrupt. All of us have faced moments that tap into this dramatic territory, choices that changed the future. Explore the autobiographical decisions you've made. If after doing your creative writing on this topic, you are interested in creating a story around this key event, go for it. Give your character a chance to twist in the wind.

Three Tahitians, (1899) by Paul Gaugin, courtesy of Wikipaintings

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