

Ingredients:

2 characters with a prior relationship

A request

(That's it! That's what makes it so simple!)

RECIPE

Directions:

As an exercise in revising or reimagining one of your stories, you can tackle this in a couple of different ways. First, you can simply read through the story looking for opportunities to incorporate a request moment. This holds true if you're working on a novel: look through your chapters for such an opportunity. My suggestion is that you look to insert a request moment either very early on in order to cement tension early on, or use it as a feature of your story's climax (you may, for example, have a story with a great premise that doesn't possess any significant climax--a request moment may solve that).

When looking for an opportunity to insert a request moment, pay attention to those moments in a scene where somebody simply agrees, perhaps too easily, to do something. I find this often in writers I mentor, and now I think: turn this into a request! For example: "Hey, I need to get to work," Sarah said. "No problem," Jim replied, "I'll babysit Harry today." What if this was a request? What wonderful new narrative directions might this take your story? What tensions might it create? What does it say about Sarah and Jim?

You could also take the approach of not looking at your existing manuscript. Instead go for a long walk and reflect on your story in a more general sense, away from the actual sentences and scenes. Ask yourself: Who might want what and from whom? This is a brilliant and transformative question to ask yourself. It allows you to enter your process of reimagining the page from a fresh, new angle. Plus, I love how it frees me from the notion that there needs to be overt conflict between characters. Look at that Carver scene. There's a moment of conflict, yes, when she freaks out over his ignorant question about the wife's name and ethnicity, but most of the tension is from the request moment and from the process of negotiation that follows.

