



Step 2: Sizzling Starts A Trip to the Zoo ... Gone Wrong

Before

I leapt out of bed that morning and hurried to get dressed because today Dad was taking us to the zoo. I was really excited because they have this big monkey enclosure there and I was mad about monkeys. I also needed to get some really good photos for my science project.

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This start 'wastes' time talking about what happens BEFORE they get to the zoo. Start with action, at the moment of change.
.....

After

'Here,' I told my sister, 'hold my rucksack. I'm just going to get a bit closer to the monkey's cage.'

A bit closer meant over the fence, past the sign that said 'No entry' and right up to the wire.

'You're monkey mad,' said my sister.

Well, maybe I was. But I was also desperate for an A in my latest science project. A picture of a cute monkey, smiling right at the camera, might make all the difference.



Step 2: Sizzling Starts Feel the Fear

Before

One day I asked my daughter what she wanted for her birthday present.

'Skydiving,' she said.

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Start with the action grab and then backfill as the action unfolds to make the writing more interesting.
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After

'Don't forget,' shouted the skydiving instructor above the noise of the wind, 'when you jump out of the plane, head back, arms on your chest.' I nodded. Gulped. Smiled. Then surreptitiously checked the four strong clips that held me to the instructor.

Tandem skydiving is something other people do. So why was I about 10,000 feet up in the air and about to jump? What else do you do for your daughter's 21st?

I looked across at my daughter, who was grinning in delight while trying to persuade her instructor to do a backwards somersault in the air with her.



Step 3: Tightening Tension

An Earthquake Ruined My Birthday

Before

We were having fun in the restaurant when suddenly the ground started to shake. I didn't believe it. Then glasses started to break all over my plate. My sister tried to stand up, she was afraid. The ground was trembling, there was noise everywhere ...

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The writer tries to use senses to build tension, but it could be much better ...

.....

After

The waiter smiled as he put down a hot chocolate pudding right in front of me.

'You're not going to eat all that!' said my dad. 'Here, I'll help!' He reached across with his spoon, he was always teasing me. I pulled my plate away fast. Everyone laughed.

'Just a little bit,' Dad begged.

I shook my head. It was weird, but there was a strange buzzing sound as if everything was not quite real. I lifted my spoon, and my hands felt like they were shivering. Or was it really the floor shaking? It wasn't possible, but now all the glasses were starting to clink. Suddenly one fell, shattering glass across my hands and pudding. Then the noise hit me, harsh, grinding, vibrating right into my brain ...



Step 3: Tightening Tension Jump

Before

He stood at the flying fox and he was really scared. Jacob was sneering at him again.

'You can do it,' said the instructor. 'Trust in yourself.'

Kon took a deep breath. Then he grabbed hold of the bar really tightly and jumped.

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This isn't a bad tension scene! It uses Dynamic Dialogue and some of the Five + 1 Senses, but look how much better it can be. Great tension scenes are long and strong, with plenty of detail to make the reader feel like they are right there with the character.

After

Heights ... heights ... Kon had always hated heights. He fought the thudding of his heart.

His hands gripped the bar of the flying fox. His knuckles were tight and rigid. Below him the valley stretched out, green and deep and far, far below.

'Go on. I dare ya.' It was the voice of Jacob, that faint sneering in his voice as always.

'He's chicken.'

'He won't jump...'

'He'll never do it.' The sounds of Jacob's buddy bullies seemed to surround him. Sometimes they were worse than Jacob.

Kon fought for breath. Hot prickles of fear and loathing washed over him. He looked down at the valley below. The trees were so tall. The ground was so deep and dark.

'See, I told ya!' Jacob again.

The handle of the flying fox seemed so slippery. Could he hold on?

Thick tears of sweat rolled down his face. Quickly he lifted a hand and wiped them away. Would they think they were tears?

There was movement beside him, the instructor was saying something. Kon fought to see his face.

'You can do it,' said the instructor. 'You have the courage.' Kon shook his head. His fingers were frighteningly white on the bar.

'Trust me,' said the instructor, 'and trust in yourself.' The words echoed in his brain. Kon couldn't make sense of them. Yet strangely there was a calmness there, a confidence flowing out to him. The instructor smiled at him.

Kon looked out over the valley and saw the rich green of the tree tops and the glittering strength of the bar he was holding. Somehow he was taking a breath, long and deep. Then another. Then one more.

Then his body tightened and his knees bent and pushed forward. His hands gripped the bar like steel.

Then he jumped off – and flew.



Step 5: Show, Don't Tell Mandy to the Rescue

Before

Mandy was always really confident and she was kind too.

If you TELL, you tend to say something straight out, and it's often boring. If you SHOW, then the writing is longer, but far more powerful and convincing.

After

The traffic lights were just starting to flash red.

'Come on,' cried Mandy as she charged across the street. 'We'll be late.'

Behind us an old lady followed. She shuffled into the intersection, head bowed, shopping bag on her arm.

The lights were totally red now.

Suddenly there was a loud blast of a horn.

I looked back – the old lady was only halfway across and a car was edging forward impatiently. Then I saw Mandy. She stepped back onto the road and held up her hand firmly to the car. Then, taking the old lady's arm, she helped her slowly, painstakingly to the safety of the footpath.



Step 5: Show, Don't Tell The House on the Hill

Before

The old house was really dark and creepy. Katy and I were trying to be brave.

Telling the reader that the house is dark and creepy isn't very convincing. Think about what makes the house so scary and then SHOW the reader.

After

It was dark in the house, but the light at the top of the stairs made shadows where none should be. Weird. There should have been silence too, but all around us were these tiny creaking sounds, so low I wondered if they were real. Then came a scurry of feet, way too large to be mice.

'Rats?' whispered Katy.

I shook my head and swallowed hard. 'I don't think so,' I muttered. My mouth was dry.