



AMY HERRICK

on writing

THE TIME FETCH

her first book for young readers

I've always wanted to write about the end of December when the wheel comes around and the old year reaches its end.

We modern guys, we tinsel up the streets and devote ourselves to jollification and fail to notice that the days are growing shorter and shorter and something dark is moving toward us. With the passing of the years we have allowed ourselves to be lulled into forgetfulness. But the ancients knew what was happening when they sat around their fires in caves, when they erected their great watching circles of stones. They felt the implacable turning of the earth and the cold wheeling of the stars, and they stood together and pushed valiantly back against the darkness. What came would be terrible. Or wonderful.

For a long time I'd been searching for a way to tell a story about this, but I could but never find my handle. It wasn't until right in the middle of one of our December holiday parties that an idea came to me.

We've been throwing this party for years. It's a tradition that has been passed down from my side of the line. My mother threw such a party and her mother before her. For our family, it has grown into a reckless mix of Christmas, Chanukah, and Saturnalia celebrations. Every year we sit down in November and make a reasonably sized guest list, and in the following weeks my husband and my sons, without consulting me, invite everybody else they run into. It's true



Photo Credit: Breukellen Riesgo

AMY HERRICK

is a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Every morning, she and her dog take a long walk in Prospect Park in Brooklyn, New York, looking for adventure. They've seen and heard many wondrous things there, some of which have served as inspiration for this story.

“Wouldn't it be weird if it turned out that something had gotten into our world and was stealing our time? I mean, what if all our minutes are just a little bit shorter than they used to be, and we just haven't noticed it yet?”

that lots of people will bring food, but each day in the weeks preceding the party, the guest list swells. I come right up to the brink of losing my mind. There will not be enough time to get it all done. Now I must add to the multitude of everyday chores and interruptions all the sugar plum fairy tasks of holiday schlepping and cleaning and baking. There will be reindeer cookies and six-pointed star cookies, latkes and a gingerbread house, spinach pies and lasagna, a turkey and a ham and smoked fish. I will decorate every doorway and window, inside and out, with lights and evergreens. The menorah's candles will burn bravely against the ticking of the clock. Our tree will look out upon the street, hung to within an inch of its life with birds and bells and chocolate Santas and the little blown-glass carousels passed down to me from my mother.

A few years ago, at the very topmost moment of the turning of the year, smack in the middle of one of these parties, I sat down for the first time in weeks. Slightly delirious, starving, and victorious. As always, I had no clear idea how I had gotten it all done in time. Outside, the cold and the dark pressed their faces to the window, but in here was light and warmth and everybody I loved. Over on the other side of the room, musical instruments were being toodled and tuned and tapped, an electric piano, a guitar, a violin, a set of bongo drums. Someone handed me a plate of food and a glass of wine, and my oldest friend, Kate, took a seat by my side. I've known her since we were six. Our moms were pals.

"I swear," she said, "it comes around faster and faster every year. I don't know how you get this all done."

I laughed. "I was just thinking the same exact thought."

"Doesn't it seem to you our mothers had more time in their days?" she pondered. "More hours?"

It was true. Our childhoods had felt so much roomier.

It was then that the thought popped into my head and I said it out loud.

"Wow. Wouldn't it be weird if it turned out that something had gotten into our world and was stealing our time? I mean, what if all our minutes are just a little bit shorter than they used to be, and we just haven't noticed it yet?"

She looked at me nervously. She is easily spooked. "Who would do that? Who would steal time? What would they do with it?"

Those questions, of course, I had no ready answers for, but I knew I had the beginning of my winter solstice story, the turning of the wheel, a time thief, and a gathering of friends to fight off the darkness and the cold.

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