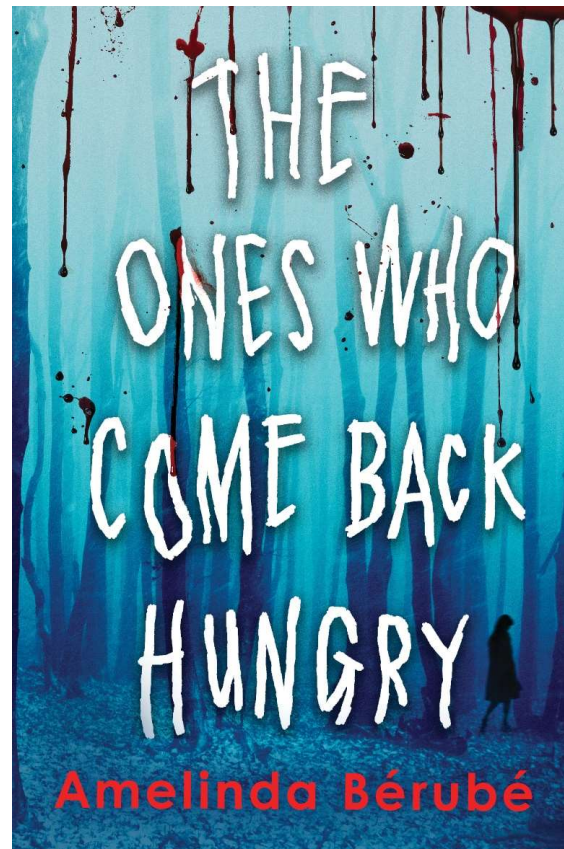


# Amelinda Bérubé

*The Dark Beneath the Ice*  
*Here There Are Monsters*



...and coming July 2:  
*The Ones Who Come Back Hungry*



BlueSky, Instagram, TikTok:

@metuiteme

# Let's write a story!



...in  
1,000  
words!

What can you even do in 1000 words???

# What does a story really need to be successful? ...to IMMERSE the reader

On its own you get...

1. Something happens...
  - CHANGE



a rush through non-stop  
action with no emotion

+

2. ...involving people
  - WHO FEEL REAL



a detailed portrait or  
snapshot that doesn't go  
anywhere

Neither works by itself!

# The key to a short story

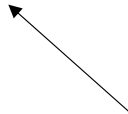
## THE MOMENT THINGS CHANGE

...for the character

- Realization
- Decision
- Turning point in a relationship

...for the reader

- Realization
- Understanding
- Assumptions overturned



This one is tricky!  
BUT if you can pull it off,  
it's SUPER effective

# To determine your “plot”

- Build on that core moment of change
  - What does the reader NEED to know to understand it?
  - What do you NEED to include to get that info to the reader?

“ACK this is too long!”

**FINISH WRITING FIRST...and THEN edit**

To shorten, go through your work and ask yourself...

“What effect was I going for? Do I **need** this to achieve it?”

**EVERY WORD/SENTENCE/IMAGE/CHARACTER  
HAS TO JUSTIFY ITS EXISTENCE**

# An example: “Jack the Ripper”

An undated story by Shirley Jackson; probably early work (she started publishing stories at 27)

Not published until after her death

Around 1800 words

Can we make it fit 1k???

## Start as close to the action as you can

The man hesitated on the corner under the traffic light, then started off down the side street, walking slowly and watching the few people who passed him. It was long past midnight, and the streets were as nearly deserted as they ever get; as the man went down the dark street he stopped for a minute, thinking he saw a dead girl on the sidewalk. She was nearly against the wall of a building; a few feet beyond her was the small sign of a bar, and seeing that, the man started to walk on, and then turned back to the girl.

She was so drunk that when he shook her and tried to sit her up she sagged backward, her eyes half closed and her hands rolling on the sidewalk. The man stood and looked at her for a minute, and then turned again and went down to the bar. When he opened the door and went in he saw that the place was nearly empty, with only a group of three or four sailors at the farther end of the bar, and the bartender with them, talking and laughing. There was one man standing at the bar near the doorway, and after looking around for a minute, the man who had come in walked over and stood at the end of the bar.

“Listen,” he said, “there’s a girl lying out on the street outside.”

Would this work instead?

When the man hurried into the bar, long past midnight, the place was nearly empty. Only three or four sailors sat at the far end with the bartender, talking and laughing.

“Listen,” the man said, “there’s a girl lying out on the street outside.”

## Summarize or skip less important actions and transitions

“Comes in here every night and gets drunk,” the bartender went on. “I let her have a beer now and then without money, do you want I should rent her a room, too?” He leaned back again and his voice softened. “Sleeps like a baby, don’t she?” He turned around abruptly and walked back down the bar to the sailors. “Another drunk,” he said to them.

The man turned to the door and opened it, still hesitating. Then he went out. “Don’t forget to tell him what I told you,” the man down the bar called after him.

When he got back to the girl he saw that she still lay in the same position, face against the sidewalk, with her knees against the wall. Her pocketbook lay on the sidewalk beside her, and

Would this work instead?

“Comes in here every night and gets drunk,” the bartender went on. “I let her have a beer now and then without money, do you want I should rent her a room, too?” He leaned back again and shook his head. His voice softened. “Sleeps like a baby, don’t she?”

When the man got back to the girl he saw that she still lay in the same position, face against the sidewalk, with her knees against the wall. She was so drunk that when he shook her and tried to sit her up she sagged backward, her eyes half closed and her hands rolling on the sidewalk. Her pocketbook lay beside her, and the man picked it up and opened it. There was no

## **Remove unnecessary repetition (Have you already made this point with another word/line/character/image/scene? Are you explaining something you've already implied?)**

the man picked it up and opened it. There was no money; there was a lipstick from the five and ten, and a key, a comb, and a little notebook; he opened it and found, on the first page, the girl's name and address. When he turned the first page he found a list of about twenty bars, with addresses and, in some cases, names of the bartenders. A few pages later he found another list, this time of sailors, each name followed by the name of a ship, and a date, apparently the date of the last time the ship was in New York. The entries were written in big, childish writing, with uncrossed Ts and an occasional misspelling. Toward the end of the notebook, a picture had been put between the pages. It showed the girl with two sailors, one on each side, their heads together, and all three smiling. The girl in the picture looked pleased and unattractive; lying on the ground, she seemed thin and almost lovely. The man put the picture back into the notebook and the

# Picky fixes

- Can you cut extra words?
  - Filters (“Jane knew it was hopeless” vs. “It was hopeless”)
  - Verb tense (“was standing” vs. “stood”)
  - Dialogue tags (not always needed)
  - Crutch words (just, that, only, really, quite, rather, seemed/seemed to, nearly, began/began to...)
  - Adjectives and adverbs vs. strong verbs, adjectives, nouns
    - (“extremely loud” → “thunderous”)
    - “walking sneakily” → “slinking”)

# It IS possible to edit too much

If it feels

- rushed
- disjointed
- confusing
- unresolved

... you have cut back too hard

When you can't tell, you need READER EYEBALLS – their reaction is your best guide

# Don't sweat it TOO hard

Treat editing like an experiment or a puzzle

- “what happens if...?”

Try making changes in a copy of the file or a blank document

If it DOESN'T fit in 1k words, congratulations, you have a short story you can use elsewhere

- The contest is not the only use for short stories (see for example [www.castofwonders.org](http://www.castofwonders.org), which welcomes SFF submissions from young authors!)
- Writing is never wasted...if nothing else, you can reuse it for parts

# Questions? Thoughts?

Use the chat or put up your hand!

My contact info is on my website:

[www.metuiteme.com](http://www.metuiteme.com)