

“No plan survives first contact with the enemy...”

By Holly Lisle

Or second contact...

Or third...

The quote may come from Helmuth von Moltke the Elder, or Carl von Clausewitz, or Dwight D. Eisenhower... or just some dude who knew shit.

But it's true – and it isn't just true about war.

It's true about any sort of creation that requires spontaneous adaptation to unknowable but expected change. Like writing fiction.

I outline while knowing the nature of outlining, which is this –

The thing fictional characters do when presented with a story plan is to act around the plan – to do something that will beat the plan. Fictional heroes and villains alike invariably act like real human beings. That is, they work to improve their own odds of success inside the story, and by doing so, they invariably shift the odds in their favor, and invariably surprise me.

These surprises are good for the story – if they surprise me, they will surprise the reader.

They're just such a pain in the ass... because my heroes AND my villains keep blowing up my nice, neat, carefully plotted outline.

But anyway, that's where I am today – several hours into my

workday, having to stop to re-plot the next few scenes of my outline to maintain the structure of the story I'm building so that I can keep the cool shit one of the little jerks just did.



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Today's words funded by my Ko-Fi supporters.

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FICTION WRITERS! Sign up for Holly's Thursday Writing Tips



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When a house is not a home (and a READERS-ONLY request)... 1266 words, and 9439 total

By Holly Lisle

I thought I knew what was going to happen today... and what

happened did fit exactly inside my objectives for the scene, while at the same time turning everything I'd planned inside out and upside down on me and surprising me completely.

And the cool twist of the day operated on the following writing principle:

Always assume your characters are smarter than you, that they're not telling you the truth about the situations that they're in, and that when you think you have a thing figured out and are getting ready to reveal it, the character who was supposed to be shocked is the one who is going to say, "You thought THAT was the surprise? Oh, please... This is what's really going on."

I love that moment – it's pure Muse, it shows me how parts of my mind have been working outside of my assumption of what I think I'm doing, so that when it all comes together, I'm shocked. And delighted. And the pieces all still fit – just not the way I expected them to.

It happens to me a lot – and today, it was especially fun.

A NOTE FOR URBAN FANTASY READERS ONLY

If you're interested in the way these stories are coming together, and you want to be in on the five-book/five-month launch when I finish them and take them live, you can sign up for my launch list here.

Holly's "Not-Yet-Revealing-the-Pseudonym" Pre-Launch List

Once I have all five books done in first draft, I'll do the revision.

Of all five books.

At once.

This is what's technically known in fiction writing circles as a "a big pain in the ass" (seriously... that is a bona fide technical term) – but it's also the best way to make sure all five books connect deeply to each other, and the best way to get rid of weird "I changed my mind halfway through the series" continuity errors.

While I'm doing that, readers will start getting "urban fantasy girl" emails, where I'll be asking you some questions, and we'll be talking about urban fantasy in general, and mine in particular.

Once I have the revision done and have the books in Matt's hands (he's been my content editor for twenty-six years, and he's a great one), the folks on the pre-launch list will start being invited to discussions about cover art, series titles, characters you love and why... fun stuff that will at the same time help me figure out where in the Urban Fantasy landscape these books will fit (and that will let you figure out whether they're the kind of urban fantasy you like).

I'll be asking some questions, answering some questions, maybe giving a few teasers, DEFINITELY giving away two free short stories for all launch participants... and once you're comfortable that these either are or aren't your kind of urban fantasy, I'll invite the folks who are pretty sure this is your kind of thing to pick up the actual novel. Five books. Five months. Absolute best prices on all of them during the launch.

Once again, **for urban fantasy fans only**, here's the sign-up form.

Holly's "Not-Yet-Revealing-the-Pseudonym" Pre-Launch List

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No jury duty, 1588 words, and am now over 20% through Book 3 of 5 (also... fasting...)

By Holly Lisle

I'm grateful for writing, and for being well into a story that holds my attention and makes me need to know what happens next.

Having been fasting since Sunday night, I've now had nothing but coffee, water, and vitamins for long enough that my hindbrain has started taking action against me.

My legs keep picking me up and walking me into the kitchen and toward the fridge – until my mind catches them at their treachery and turns me around with some difficulty and walks me back.

But all the news is good news.

Being notified last night that **I'm released from jury duty** until the next term when I'm drawn, I was able to focus on the fiction (in between the fights between my mind and my legs), and get some good, tight words.

1588, well over my 1250-word objective.

I threw myself into the story, and managed to not open the fridge, or touch any little “just something” snacks.

I am not by any means world's greatest student of the art of fasting – but I can keep reminding myself that we'll all eat tonight, and use that knowledge to reassure the part of my

brain sending me in search of food when I forgot to block it that a meal is, in fact, not far off.

On today's bit of the story: A father tells a daughter how she is to leave home – and why. And in her I found the replacement for the character who I'd planned for her role (while doing those five line-for-scene outlines), and who was entirely wrong for this particular part.

This is the third of five novels, and in it, a central battle is building – and NOW I have the right character to step into the role I'd arbitrarily assigned to an existing character who didn't have the strength or the skills to carry it.

Total word count: 19,799. **I passed 20% of the first draft finished when I hit 18,000, but didn't notice.**

And since I always run at least a bit long, today's word count is probably closer to a true 20%.

Now I'm off to do the rest of the day's work. And the rest of this week is mine without concern for being pulled away from my writing by jury duty.



Readers – Join this list to be invited to the Ohio Novels launch when it's ready!



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Fat's Where It's At – A quirky scene, and 1657 words. AWESOME writing Friday!

By Holly Lisle

I have been beating the crap out of my main character on a regular basis – she has a dangerous and very weird job, and she's pissed off some seriously WRONG folks.

Over the last few writing days, I've been clobbering her.

Today, while recovering, she started looking at herself through a different lens. And because she's starting to change the way she sees the world...

She's started asking better questions.

Today's scene was a LOT of fun to write, and I discovered (right along with my main character) something that I didn't realize was going on, hadn't planned, and didn't expect.

But what my MC and I discovered today fits perfectly, and it moves the series in a direction it needs to go.

Today, she asked the first of many RIGHT questions she'll need to answer to get to the eventual truth.

On Monday when I get back to the book, she's going to come to

the wrong conclusion (the book I'm writing now is, after all, only the second book in the series). But this is most definitely going to improve the directions in which she's looking for the correct answers she will eventually uncover.

I'm truly happy with the way this series is building.

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Beat the headache. 1278 new words, and a good twist.

By Holly Lisle

First, the headache, because it was the biggest obstacle I faced this morning.

Over the holidays, we did an intentional, planned drift away from keto so that we could have some fun foods. Pies, you know, and cookies, and stuff like baked potatoes and stuffing. We hadn't done this before, but we hadn't dealt with last year, before, either, which sucked... and just for the holidays, we agreed to be a little flexible where food was concerned.

We all three had fun eating. We all three also gained a little weight. Not a lot – we were still doing intermittent fasting – which for us is generally one meal a day, or, if you're

figuring in ratios, 1:23. One hour in which we eat, twenty-three in which we don't.

We also widened our ratios, to about 6:18, which is still about as wide as we care to go.

Back to the headache. When you return to keto, you get a headache. I'm going to be able to count on this one for a good week before my body readjusts and it goes away.

Was it worth it?

Dunno. Ask me in a week, by which time the headache should wear off.

But throbbing, banging head pain aside, I did get 1278 words today that I really like, while cleaning up and adding to the scene I started last Friday.

I've met some new bad guys. My main character finds the smaller one adorable and truly compelling, and is not having the easiest time in the world seeing him as a "not someone I should love". There are reasons for this beyond the fact that that my delightful villain is someone most human beings would want to take home and be friends with forever.

The bigger bad guy is NOT anything like the little one. But might have some good surprises for me as I keep writing.

Writing the conflict in the scene today, and figuring out what was truly going on as I wrote it, was a blast.

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A good and angry Tuesday – the novel's midpoint conflict comes to life

By Holly Lisle

Was at work by nine (I slept in a little) and just finished my words. Goal is always 1250, and I got 1412 – so I came out a little ahead.

If you look at my screen shot of the word counter, you can see that I could have quit at 1242 and still stayed on deadline today.

I didn't because today's words, while they took pretty much the whole three hours allotted, weren't hard to find.

If I have a number of days like that, my required words to hit my deadline could end up going under a thousand.

HOWEVER...

I'll still work to hit 1250 words or better every day because...

You always have THOSE days, where you end up ripping out more than you write, where you can't think, where you can't make the story come together.

If I don't have any days like that, I'll finish Ohio #2 early (before my scheduled Feb.18), and start outlining the first draft of Ohio #3.

If I do have some of THOSE days, however, I'll stand a much better chance of not falling behind.

As for what I got today...

This woman I met in the story yesterday who was winding up to

be a real “spoke in the wheel, monkey-wrench in the works” about her involvement in my main character’s job in this small town calmed down a tiny bit today. I don’t yet know whether my MC has managed to win her over or not. **MRS. X** might still walk and take other folks my MC needs with her.

But she isn’t going to succeed in destroying the whole wonderful thing my MC is involved in. So for me, that felt like a pretty big win.

* * *

And today I remembered to reset my Ko-Fi account for January, 2021, and put up my new notice. If you’re interested, you can see what I’m doing with Ko-Fi... and why... below.

Ko-Fi pays me to write fiction for 3 hours per day, 5 days a week: <https://ko-fi.com/hollylisle>

Sometimes I work longer than that. But that’s on me.

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The Ghost Who’ll Be Coming to Ohio

By Holly Lisle

The text message at the top of this post (which I sent to Matt at 3:34 AM on 12/6/20) includes the date and time because my half-sister, Julie, died in 2016, before her birthday, which was December 3rd.

I got the news of her death from my older son, Mark, who

called Matt while we were sitting in a Pancake House in South Florida.

Mark had received the news from his grandmother, my first ex-mother-in-law, who'd been told by my mother, who was the bitch who didn't even let me know my sister was sick. "Mom" (said with the sort of sneer that inserts your favorite epithet in its place) just waited for Julie to die before passing on the news, and in her spectacularly cowardly fashion, sending it by third-hand sources.

That's "Mom's" style – waiting for folks to die, so that she can gloat over the knowledge, punishing me because after my son came to me to tell me about being molested by his father, Mom called him a liar – and me too. And I told her I that she and I were done.

My ex was found guilty, and convicted, and sentenced, by the way.

So both my sister's and my father's deaths have been third-hand news and both discovered way after the fact...

But you're never as done with the trash in your life as you might hope.

The funny thing is, when the Bitch Queen croaks, I'll never know. I'm remarkably okay with that.

But in any case, my sister's birthday was December 3rd. She would have been fifty-six this year, and I'd celebrated her birthday privately. And I'd been thinking about her.

And in one of those weird, disorienting dreams, on December 6th, I dreamed that I was fifteen again, that she and I were in the horrible torture-device fold-out couch in the sunroom of our single-wide trailer, which, in the manner of most sunrooms, didn't have any walls between it and the room next to it. In that trailer, the kitchen/dining room was there.

In my dream, Julie was on the right side of the fold-out bed (her spot) and sound asleep, while I was awake on the left. I'd dreamed that she stole the covers and kicked me – she was a magnificent blanket-stealer and kicked like a mule, and it was her kick that woke me up.

And I reached over to grab the covers, and she wasn't there.

So I grabbed my phone and texted Matt (who was awake and downstairs): "What happened to Julie? She was here..."

And he didn't text me back. He just came upstairs, looked in at me, and said, "Are you okay?"

And first I remembered that I wasn't fifteen. Not asleep in a single-wide trailer in the trailer park above Beaver Creek State Park. Married, with kids. With a husband who at that moment was looking in on me with slightly unsettled bemusement.

I said, "Oh."

But following right on that first realization, I remembered that Julie was dead. It came as a hard, mean shock, because just a second before, I'd been fifteen and she'd been right there with me and had kicked me awake while stealing the covers yet again.

And I said, "OH!" And my throat tightened up and for a couple minutes it got hard to breathe.

And that would have been it – weird dream, disturbing and disorienting but totally explicable – except for this morning.

When I woke up realizing that my main character in the Ohio Novels also has a half-sister. It was just a line in passing in the revision of Book 1, and I'd never planned to use the sister character.

This morning however, I realized that while my bitch of a

mother made sure I never got to say goodbye to Julie, I don't have to. Not entirely. A part of my memory of her can live on in fiction.

My main character's sister is going to become part of the Ohio series. I probably won't name her Julie. But she'll be dark-haired, blue-eyed, and not look even remotely like her half-sister. Or her mother.

Just like Julie and me. Unlike Julie, the fictional sister won't have been born with cerebral palsy or mental retardation, so she'll get to do all the cool shit Julie never got to do in real life.

And in my own way, I'll get to say goodbye.

Related links:

1. <https://hollylisle.com/into-the-new-year-words-for-2017/>
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Streamlining During Chaos: Fiction? YES.

By Holly Lisle

Nothing is yet cast in stone... but in about a week the full force of this particular Chaos Storm is going to hit. The Current Chaos™ is pretty close to becoming the Big Right On Top Of Me Chaos – a state that could last from a best case of one month to a worst case of maybe three.

(See me bravely ignoring the “Wanna bet on that worst case?”

utterance from my Muse, who has ridden this train before.)

I can't accomplish everything I want to do and still do what I need to do. So I have put some things on hold for a while in order to accomplish anything.

My brain turns to fiction when things get rough, stressful, difficult. It always has – reading when I was a kid, writing when other people's worlds stopped being what I needed.

I won't complain. Being able to fall into fiction when things are hard is a Big Damn Advantage when you're a novelist. I've decided this time to play to my strengths, and to NOT try to do everything.

So from today until we're out the other side of this, my writing is going to be exclusively fiction.

Objectives:

- **WRITE:** Complete the first novel in The Ohio Series and get it into its month of cool down. (I'm only a couple chapters from the end, so this is a small goal.)
- **REVISE:** Finish the write-in and type-in revisions of Dead Man's Party and get it out to beta readers. (I'm most of the way through the write-in revision, but still have a significant type-in ahead of me, and I do a LOT of on-the-spot revision and adding things during type-in, so thing is a BIG goal.)
- **OUTLINE AND WRITE:** The Emerald Sun first draft. (And this is a big goal, too.)

I'll do a worksheet or two for the podcast as we need them.

I will NOT be starting into the Canary Revision of *How to Revise Your Novel*. until after I'm through the biggest part of the coming mess.

My plan had been to pick that up on Monday and do it as an after-fiction thing. At this point, by best-case scenario

moves that to early September.

Absolute worst case, the first part of next year. (Never start a massive project in December.)



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Fung Fasting Report #5: The Breakthrough Month

By Holly Lisle

This was the month in which I broke through my 3-days fasting block.

Went four days easily and comfortably on just water, coffee, and a daily multivitamin, and I think I could have done five, but we had a roast that needed to be cooked and eaten before it went bad.

I fasted yesterday just because I felt like it, and the jury is still out on whether or not I'll want to eat today. I probably will, but we'll see. I don't want my body to get complacent, or to have a regular schedule it can count on.

This was a month in which I dealt with massive stresses, both financial and technical, as we completed all but the clean-up part of getting the HollysWritingClasses.com site out of beta.

It was the month in which – if I were ever going to revert to the secret stress eating that, along with a one-time diet of gummy bears and Diet Coke, pushed me over (probably way over) 220 lbs – I would have.

It was a rough damn month from start to late middle. But it finished pretty well, and so did I.

Waist just prior to adopting keto and fasting: 42” (106.7 cm)

Waist today: 31” (78.7 cm) – 13” (33 cm)

But that’s just a number.

I look in the mirror and for the first time in years, my face is the “right” face – I see the person I was at 25, before my life took that first careening left turn into Bad Shitville.

I don’t look twenty-five, of course.

If you’re fifty-seven and you do, you’ve either made a deal with the devil or a plastic surgeon, and I’m not sure which would be more detrimental to you in the long run.

But I know this face. It has the right angles, the right plains, the right jaw. I have laugh lines around my eyes, but I’d already decided when I was a teenager that I’d rather have laugh lines than frown lines.

And from the point where I decided that, I’ve lived my life with that in mind, always looking for humor even in the middle of darkness and ugliness.

And while I have a lot of laugh lines, I don’t have any frown lines.

I know this body. It runs up stairs, and lopes across the parking lot. It launches me out of bed with a quick rolling snap, from lying down to standing with nothing in between. It picks up socks and underwear with its toes, flips them into my

hand with a deft little move we practiced after seeing Matt do it when we first got together, and thinking that was really cool.

It moves the way I remember it moving – fast and smooth and without pain.

I know this brain. It wakes up in the morning ready to go, full of ideas and conversations, full of focus. Full of smart-ass commentary on everydamnthing.

I am more focused, quicker to accomplish tasks. I fall asleep easier. I wake up easier.

I'm fifty-seven, and I felt like THIS when I was twenty-five.

On food...

Feasting is nice on occasion, and we had our little 4th of July feast with Matt's family, in which I ate vegan cookies with sugar in them without regret. (They were delicious.)

Cookies without guilt or regret. Imagine that.

I'm eating straight keto with fewer than 20 carbs per day on a 23:1 intermittent fasting schedule.

So one day of eating outside of keto in a month when I eat one healthy meal and NO snacks every day... except for the days when I fast is not a sin, or a cause for guilt.

It is a little moment of celebration in a life where celebration comes at the end of hard work, and focus, and dedication.

I'm still hanging in with my old clothes, because I HATE shopping, and the tucks I've done work – but everything is baggy, and even the smaller old clothes I had shoved into the back of the closet with that wistful "I used to be this size" stigma radiating off of them are now back in use, and are too

loose.

I'll eventually have to stop being a miser and go buy some damn clothes.

But not today. Probably not next month, either.

There is something wonderful about being both healthy and energetic AND too small for your skinny clothes, and besides...

I still have scissors and thread, and I know how to use 'em.

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The Fung Fasting Report #4: More success

By Holly Lisle

After the "Failed to drink enough water, felt like crap" fast last month, this month I decided to skip any extended fasting. I have held to:

ONE ketogenic meal a day, NO snacks. We had a family holiday in the month over at my inlaws' place (combined birthday and Father's Day) so there one day of eating utterly NON-keto food.

Delicious, but not the way we eat.

We ate, we enjoyed, and when we came back home, we just picked up where we left off.

This, after all, is not a religion. It's just a very effective

way to dump body fat and get healthy.

So. With just Intermittent fasting, NO extended fasts, and with one meal of “Everything I shouldn’t eat, but did...” where am I now?

Waist: 33.75” (85.725 cm)

Down 8.25” (20.995 cm)

And how do I feel? Excellent. No weakness, no fatigue, a LOT of work done in the past month.

And my size 10 jeans and jean shorts, which when I started this were painfully tight to the point of being unwearable, now fall down.

I don’t have smaller clothes.

So at some point I’m going to have to bite the bullet and get some, I guess. I only clothes shop about once every three or four years, though, and none of the size 10 clothes, which were not getting much use, are worn out yet, so I’m looking at breaking out my sewing skills and taking the waists in.

One Tip

We had eggs and sausage as our one meal on Friday. Was delicious. But unlike EVERY other meal we’ve had, all three of us were hungry the next day.

And were hungry the whole day, and ate like famished wolves at mealtime, and were looking at each other when the food was gone muttering, “What else do we have?” I ended up snacking on walnuts. Matt and the kid (now 20) just toughed it out.

Today, no problem. I’m not hungry, and won’t be until around seven, when it’s time to eat. Yesterday’s meal of a big pan-fried pork steak and buttered fresh asparagus (and the cup of walnuts), worked.

But I can't recommend eggs and sausage as the day's one meal.
It just doesn't stick.

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