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Narrative Project—Draft 2

### **Under the Cover of Night**

It is a wet and dreary Saturday night. Amir and their friend Ayesha walk around shopping at the Franklin Mills Mall which they'd been doing the entire afternoon and well into the evening hours. Amir's feet feel very sore and tired from all the walking. Amir waits around in Burlington as Ayesha finishes making a purchase, which takes longer than either of them expected. Amir, growing impatient, decides against waiting any longer and decides to step outside in the night air, and they're glad they have.

As Amir steps outside, pushing open the door, they are greeted by a chilly breeze that swept through this person's entire body. Standing just a few yards from the door, this individual takes in the comfortably-cold breeze. They close their eyes and grin to themselves. Amir opens their eyes, and looks across the parking lot for Ayesha's car, which isn't immediately visible in the distance.

Interestingly, the sky is pitch dark, but the streetlights all across the parking lot were brightly lit, much like the lights inside and outside the mall itself, giving the night air a brownish-orange hue. There are water puddles — some small, others large — all over the

pedestrian sidewalk as well as the parking lot, due to the fact that it had rained earlier this afternoon. There are also small dots of water glistening all over the vehicles and other objects. Why is this so fascinating? Amir loves the rain, particularly nighttime rain.

A few moments later, Ayesha exits the mall, coming out the same door Amir did, carrying a few large shopping bags in her hands, stuffed with merchandise. She walks toward her vehicle, in Amir's direction. Amir and Ayesha walk toward the Red Kia Rio. For Amir, the less-than-three-minute walk felt more like a thirty. The more steps Amir took, the more the pain in their feet radiated.

As Ayesha unlocked and open her car doors, Amir immediately pulls open the front passenger side door and sits down there. They also take a sigh of relief as they already feel the discomfort in their feet finally begin to subside. As Ayesha immediately goes right to work loading her goodies in the trunk of her car, Amir feels obligated to render — or at least offer — assistance, since Ayesha is a friend of Amir's after all.

"Need any help over there?" Amir offers, secretly hoping Ayesha would decline so that Amir would not need to stand and walk for any longer than they'd need to.

"Nah, I'm good," says Ayesha.

As hard as Amir tries not to let it show, they're glad Ayesha declined. Amir sighs in relief and looks straight ahead. Less standing and walking on their part! Amir wonders to themselves if it

was wrong to feel so happy inside that Ayesha declined their help. But then again, how wrong was Amir to offer their assistance to Ayesha, hoping she'd turn them down? What if Ayesha had said yes after all? Then what? Amir thought that that would've been a hole they themselves would've dug themselves in. Amir's mind lingered on these theories but they did next to nothing to distract them from the pain and discomfort that resisted in their feet still. Amir continues pondering these thoughts for the good minute or two it took Ayesha to shut the trunk of her car, then walk up to Amir, telling them, she needs to take care of one more thing back at the Burlington Customer Service Center.

"You gonna be okay in here?" asks Ayesha.

"Yeah!" replies Amir, confidently. "Oh yeah!"

"Okay, then, I'll be right back."

Ayesha then shuts her car door and Amir watches her as she walks back into the mall. Once she disappears into it, this is when Amir now feels completely alone... in a frightening sense. They were alone in the car but there are mall patrons and shoppers all around, walking through the parking lot, going in and out their vehicles as well as in and out the mall, carrying shopping bags. Faint sounds of small conversations could be heard taking place but it did next to nothing to ease the fear that had been racing through Amir's body like a wild virus.

It is silence. Eerie silence. It is dark in here. Eerie darkness. So silent you can hear a spider slowly climbing its tiny legs up a wall. But it is quiet and dark enough that Amir doesn't have much a problem going right to sleep. They drift off to sleep soon thereafter. But it's only a short, temporary sleep. About fifteen to twenty minutes later, Amir opens their eyes. They are not back in the car though. They wake up in a strange cold room. The room is moving and has windows. Signs of running rails, frequent clacking sounds can be heard-Amir is on board a train. They look out the window, it's a wintry night, and it's snowing. Amir gathers their bearings doesn't have much of a problem getting oriented to their surroundings, Amir exits the room and walks into the very-thin hallway. Another room catches their attention. It's more luxurious than the one they were just in, and Amir walks in it. It's a bigger room, a darker room. There are more windows that are much larger. This room is full of beautiful glowing ambient lights of purple and pink. As soon as Amir walks completely into the room, the door automatically slides shut, as if this room were that of a science fiction starship. The door has a window, shaped like a circle. A sudden thud catches Amir off guard. Amir pivots around really fast. There's a cat. She definitely wasn't there a moment ago. She is larger than the average house cat and has glowing gold eyes with intimidating fangs that she reveals when she widely opens her mouth. She slowly walks toward Amir, stretching out her front legs, extending her claws as if she is about to attack Amir. Amir attempts to quickly move away, but she moves to them just as quickly. No use in running away. But Amir moves toward the door. To their horror, the door will not open - it's locked.

"Don't bother," says a female-sounding voice, eerie and threatening. The voice came from below Amir's waist.

"No way," Amir says to themselves. "Did this cat just talk?"

"I did just speak..." says the woman's voice, "to you."

"What are you!?"

Without giving Amir a response this time the cat mutates into a human adult female with olive-colored skin, but her eyes still has that creepy gold glow and vertical red football-shaped pupils. She is nude, about 6'3, looking down at Amir with an intimidating look on her face, an evil grin. She also has long, weapon-like cat claws. Scared, Amir backs into the wall and she inches closer toward them.

"I am the one who will send you to your grave," she hisses, leaning her head by Amir's.  
"You die tonight!"

With that, she raises one hand high above her head, her dangerously-sharp claws fully extended and she viciously slashes Amir across the face with all five claws!!!

Total blackness.

Amir does not feel a thing. No pain. Nothing.

Complete nothingness.

Amir is in limbo.

Dark limbo.

Amir cannot move... but they wake up. This person's eyes slowly open and they find themselves back back inside Ayesha's car. Alone in it. Still waiting for Ayesha to return from it. For some reason, it is like Amir has on restraints and they can't move their limbs, except for maybe an inch or so but that is all. A white noise fills Amir's ears. Amir cannot even turn their head to either side. To their horror there is blood all over the windshield. Had someone been murdered and the body is on the roof? A hand suddenly SLAPS on the windshield! This scares Amir further! Amir tries like hell to move something. Anything. They cannot. Amir tries to open their mouth to scream their lungs out. No sound can come out! Just silent air. Suddenly a dark mist makes its way through the inside of the car. Amir realizes it's a ghost as they can make out a face. Suddenly, the door opens and someone is getting in. After a last-ditch effort, Amir is finally free from the invisible constraints! The blood on the windshield, the hand that slapped it, and the ghost are all gone. Amir is relieved to realize it was all a dream and a terrifying sleep-paralysis vision! Amir breathes heavily.

"Amir, are you okay?" asks Ayesha, coming in the car and closing its door.

"Yes, I'm okay now!" says Amir, breathing heavily.

"Did you have a bad dream?"

"You could say that."

"Tell me about it," Ayesha requests, starting the ignition.

"I just dreamt I was on the train and this evil cat-woman thing tried to kill me," Amir begins to explain, peaking Ayesha's interest.