

Amahl knew that today was the day. He sported his worn “I Love NY” t-shirt and a faded denim jacket (complete with American flag button) as well as faded jeans that had once been dyed a dark color. His hair was carefully slicked back, and his face bore three days worth of a beard. Amahl shared his family’s distinct skin tone, the same as many Iraqi’s have. Against the darker color of his skin, the whites of his eyes made a startling contrast.

He had just arrived at the Grand Central Station a few moments ago. As friendly as Amahl tried to appear, he still drew wary stares from passerby, and many ushered their children past him hurriedly. He smiled to himself. What the people passing him couldn’t see was the torment ravaging his mind.

Amahl’s fifteen-year old sister, mother, and father all had passed away. Amahl was the only person left in his family. Icy tears started streaming down his face. His clenched teeth were the only things keeping him from crying out in emotional pain. The smells of the subway entrance reminded him of his father.

Amahl quietly cried at he remembered his father. When he had been smaller, his father would often take him places, and they used this subway for transportation. Now,

he felt so alone as he headed to the Metro Pass booth. He asked the man behind the counter for a one-way pass and pushed two dollars over the counter. The man looked at him suspiciously for a moment, then passed over the ticket. Amahl sighed and headed towards Terminal A. He had nowhere to go, and no more family. The D-4 screeched to a stop. What irony.

Amahl boarded the D-4 and headed to the front. As he walked he passed several cars full of people of varying ages, from twelve-year-olds riding the subway for the first time to old ladies clutching their purses tightly. Still more cars passed by him as he finally reached the front car. To his surprise and grim satisfaction, it was empty. Amahl sat down and pulled the .38 caliber gun out of his coat pocket. Amahl inhaled deeply, and stood as he exhaled. It was then or never. He held the gun behind his back with his left hand and began pounding the operating room door with the other. The operator, a balding, tired-looking man, turned around.

As he did, Amahl started mouthing the word fire, and frantically pointing behind him. The operator immediately came out of the room and started running into the next car. In one swift move, Amahl moved into the conductor's booth and locked the door.

This was it. As nervous as he was, Amahl knew that it was too late to go back now. After studying for hours at the library Amahl knew exactly which buttons he needed to push. He started with the STOP button. It would take about 30 seconds to stop. As he was feeling the beginning of the subway's stop, he sent an emergency stop signal to the main switchboard operators, so they wouldn't send any other subways his direction. About six seconds before the subway would come to a full stop Amahl turned off all of the lights in the subway. He heard distant screams. Finally, he picked up the intercom, and pushed the TALK button.

“Welcome ladies and gentleman. My name is Amahl Kipras, and I have taken control of this subway. You will not be leaving and no will be coming to help you. I am no terrorist, and have no intent on killing everyone. I will give you a chance to get yourselves out of this. First though, I want to tell you something. Something about me. I want you to understand why I am doing this. I will begin.”

“My life was a happy one. My mother, father, sister and I lived happily together in a

beautiful home on the upper East-side. My parents moved to America about nineteen years ago, and my sister and I were born here as Americans. It was a new start and new life for all of us. We had escaped the bondage of our original country and arrived in the American Lands. We were in the home of the Free and Brave! The Land of Dreams.”

“But it wasn’t the land of dreams. When I started school, the other children would call me ‘darkie’, or ‘ugly’, and they would dare each other to hit me or pull my hair. I could tolerate it, but for my sister I could not. When one boy in her grade tried to hit her, I punched him so hard one of his teeth fell out. And I knew I’d done the right thing. The next morning, I got called down the Principal’s office. The Principal asked told me the boy’s parents had called the school. She asked me for my side of the story and I told her. When I finished, her face was crimson with rage. She asked me “Where did you think you have the right to hit a white boy? You’re just some Iraqi boy with a hoar sister!” And we were expelled. My sister and I. Our mother and father decided it might be best to keep us home-schooled for a while. I was only ten years old. “

“The worst of it actually came after September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. It was then that our lives became Hell. My sister and I had started public school again once we were old

enough for Middle School. The day after 9/11..... I came into school upset. I am an American, and someone tried to bomb us! As we walked down the halls, they became silent. Every single person stopped what they were doing to look at us. A few whispers floated about, as my sisters and my feet echoed loudly across the school. Finally, as we had almost reached our class, I felt something hard hit the back of my head. It was a rock. Missiles began flying through the air at me and my sister, curses flying faster than the enforcement artillery. We hurried into our class and sat down. About ten minutes later, students filed in and teacher started taking attendance. Since it was the first day of school, she did it mainly by looking at her list. When she reached my name she stopped and looked up. “Where are you from Amahl?”, she asked. I answered that I was an American. She rephrased the question by asking “Where are you ancestors from?” I replied that my ancestors hailed from Iraq. The look on her face switched from curiosity to anger. “Get out of my classroom this moment and do not come back.” She saw my sister. “Take that one with you. We don’t need anyone like you in America.” So we went home. Both of us were crying.

Over the next year, life became steadily worse. Signs began going up around the city saying “NO IRAQI’S ALLOWED”, “MADE IN AMERICA”, and “IRAQI’S GO HOME”. My family and I were shunned from anywhere and everywhere. Our home

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was given many gifts of bricks and spray paint. Someone shot our dog. Nearly a year after September 11<sup>th</sup>, a patriotic gang defended the name of America by beating my father. He died because of it. Time continued. My mother began selling drugs to try and support my sister and I. She ended up overdosing on them two years ago. And my sister..... My sister was raped a total of three times. She died from one only four days ago.”

“So maybe you can understand me a little better now. I have nothing and no one. I did nothing to anyone in America. I had no part on any terrorist activities, and neither did anyone in my family. Did my sister deserve to die? She was fifteen. American boys are the ones who raped her. Americans. The country you try to defend by turning upon me. Everywhere I go, people watch me. Mothers warn their children about people ‘like that boy over there’. Everything I have ever done was for my country. I was born her in America. I am an American. And America has betrayed me.”

“I said before that I don’t want anyone to die. I meant that. I’m going to give everyone an opportunity to live. I want you to prove me wrong. Prove to me that this isn’t what America has become. Tell me why you should live. What the point is. I have no reason to live. You have taken everything I love away from me. Now is your chance

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to redeem yourselves. Every one of you is going to have a chance. I'm going to turn off the intercom and turn the receiver on. If one of you can prove to me that America still exists, I will let the conductor back into the car. Who will start?