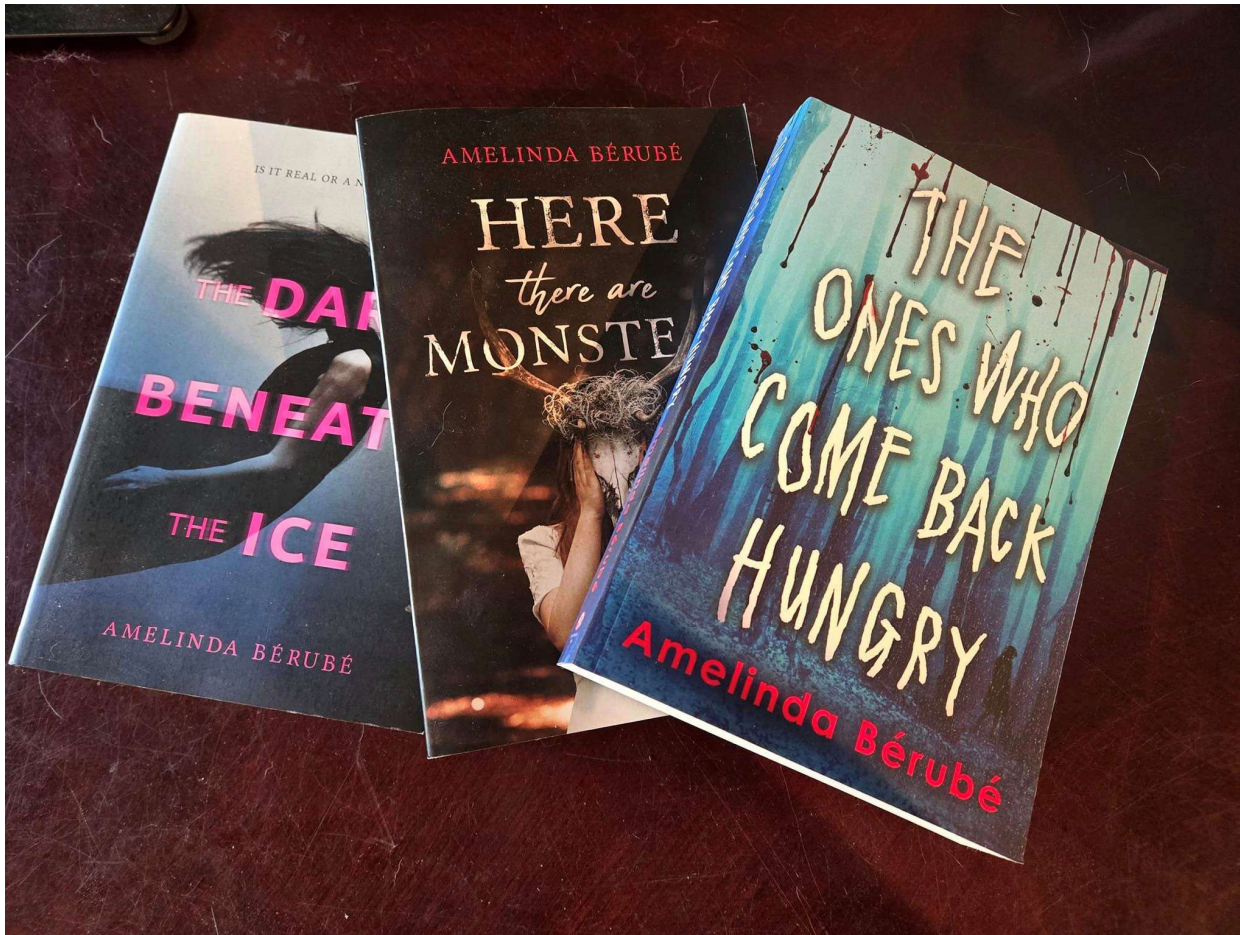


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The Dark Beneath the Ice
Here There Are Monsters
The Ones Who Come Back Hungry

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SCENE vs. SUMMARY

- Think of a TV show or a play
 - Action
 - Tension
 - Dialogue with pauses and gestures
 - Gives details
 - Unfolds in “real time”
- Think of a voiceover or a montage
 - Information
 - In brief
 - Functional
 - Can cover a long stretch of time

... SHOWING

...TELLING

A scene! (or the beginning of one, anyway)

The elevator ground to a halt with a shudder and a shriek of metal on metal. The fluorescent lights guttered and went out. Without them, the dark was absolute. Noah didn't scream, exactly, but the noise that escaped him was ugly and raw, and it sawed on Jessica's already fraying nerves.

After that the silence was terrible; their panting breaths were the only sounds. Jessica yanked her phone from her pocket and fumbled for the flashlight. Its ghostly white beam washed over the mirrored walls and the stained ceiling. NO SIGNAL glared up at her from the screen.

They were trapped in a metal box. It might as well have been a coffin.

"Oh my god," Noah whimpered, closing his eyes. "We're going to die."

"We are not," Jessica snapped, crushing down the panic that flared in her own chest at the words. She stabbed at the elevator's red emergency button – once, twice, over and over again – but nothing happened.

"Did you hear the sound they made?" Noah whispered. His dark eyes were huge and haunted. "That...sort of whistling noise?"

"We're not going to talk about that," Jessica said firmly. "We have to focus on getting out of here."

A summary!

“Oh my god,” Amina whispered, “you were *in the building*? How did you get out?”

Jessica and Noah exchanged a look. She’d been the one to run for the elevator; in hindsight, that had been a stupid decision, though Noah had been gracious – or panicked – enough not to throw that in her face. It had seized up between floors halfway to the ground, and it had been a whole nightmarish day before a man in blood-spattered camouflage had finally opened the emergency panel in the ceiling.

“We wouldn’t have,” Noah finally said, “if it wasn’t for the soldiers the Holy Order sent.”

A curtain drop!

The elevator ground to a halt with a shudder and a shriek of metal on metal. The fluorescent lights guttered and went out. Without them, the dark was absolute. Noah didn't scream, exactly, but the noise that escaped him was ugly and raw, and it sawed on Jessica's already fraying nerves. The silence that came afterward was terrible; their panting breaths were the only sounds.

They were trapped in a metal box. It might as well have been a coffin.

“Oh my god,” Noah whimpered. “We're going to die.”

Jessica's phone, down to 13%, said it was past midnight when the sound of shouting voices – human voices – and footsteps on metal jolted her out of an uneasy doze. She sprang to her feet, hauling Noah up with her. Rescue. Thank god.

“Here!” she yelled back. “We're in here! Help!”

What's the difference?

- Level of detail
- Amount of space (number of words!)
- Narrative distance / immediacy
- **Degree of emphasis**
 - The more space and detail you give something, the more immediate you make it, the more importance you give it
 - Are you giving the right amount of emphasis/immediacy/importance to the right things?

Uses of a scene

- Immersive: puts you in the story with details of setting and atmosphere
- Lets you reveal character through words and actions
- Lets you reveal conflict between characters by letting them bounce off each other (Is Jessica angry at Noah for a reason unrelated to their current predicament? What was their relationship like before this? Is one of them keeping a secret?)
- Gives you time to build tension: what's going to happen?
- Focus: SPOTLIGHT

Uses of a summary

- When you need a quick explanation:
 - Someone recounting events to another character, or remembering them – sometimes you need your reader to know what happened without resorting to a full flashback
 - In dialogue or narration – lets a character editorialize a bit and/or show us what they think of or feel about the events in question
 - A transition – sometimes you need your reader to know how your characters got from Point A to Point B, but laying it all out would be boring
 - Skimming over a stretch of time where nothing much happens (or where what happens doesn't need to be the focus)
 - Focus: A GLANCE

Uses of a curtain drop

- When the reader can fill in the blanks themselves without the explanation...just skip to the next important thing
- Sometimes even transitions are too much emphasis on the obvious or the unimportant (do we need to know how a character finishes their day after a stressful conversation? Do we need to know what happens in the two weeks before these characters meet again?)
- Focus: NONE

Which one do I use?

- Don't worry too much when you're drafting, just go with your gut
- BUT when editing...ask yourself:
 - What do I learn about my characters? What could I learn about them from events I'm not showing?
 - How much of this will be important later?
 - Have I already given this information elsewhere?
 - Am I missing information that the reader really needs?
 - Are things happening too fast or too slow?
 - Do I really need to explain this?

Exercise

- Write a scene
 - From your own work in progress
 - Using your favorite characters from elsewhere (I don't think fanfic is eligible for the story contest, but it's A-OK for these purposes)
 - Continuing or borrowing from my example
 - Using a prompt: take two people who can't STAND each other and get them stuck in an elevator and/or running from monsters and/or some other emergency where they're forced to deal with each other
- Rewrite it as a summary and a curtain drop