

## Autumn in Sapphire

"I said get out!" Autumn shouted, her eyes stinging with unshed tears. Jack said nothing and stalked to the door, slamming it behind him. Autumn's breath caught in her throat as she realized what she had done. She collapsed on the couch and closed her eyes, trying to gather her thoughts. She steadied her breathing - in and out, until she had calmed down. She stood up and made her way to her desk, meticulously arranging each and every pencil, brushing stray eraser shavings into the trash. She stacked up every book from largest to smallest until she was satisfied. Organizing things had always given her a sense of peace. She looked around at her painstakingly neat apartment and wished her life could be just as immaculate. As she stood there she got the urge to leave her apartment, the air feeling suddenly oppressive and stuffy.

She grabbed her coat out of the closet and stepped out into the freezing air. As usual, the city of fog was exceedingly foggy. She breathed in the air which smelled of fast food and smoke. She didn't feel bad about what she had done to Jack, he had been one of many who just couldn't handle someone with

dreams as big as hers. She had felt suffocated in the relationship, as she did in most of her close relationships, seeing only his flaws. She tried to push thoughts of loneliness out of her head by looking around at the colorful buildings around her. The wind whipped her long auburn hair around her face. She loved the cold and part of her wished she were still back in Providence where it would snow in the colder months. No, she told herself, trying to push away any straying thoughts of her old life.

It had happened months ago but thinking about it still hurt. Her whole life she wanted to go to Brown and become a writer. It had been a thrilling experience to finally leave San Francisco where she had lived her whole life. At Brown, she had been thriving and doing exceptionally well in all of her classes. That's when she received the news from home, her parents were getting a divorce. The news had left her stunned. It was like all the ideas and spirit she had just dried up. Overnight her coursework became overwhelming, and she became distraught. She was in her dream school living the life she had always wanted, but still she made the decision that haunted her now and dropped out. Somehow she ended up back where she

started, San Francisco, a familiar place that now seemed colorless and dead. As she walked she looked around for inspiration, but as usual, her mind came up with nothing but an expansive blank. Her feet made crunching noises as she strolled through a park, sifting aside the last leaves of fall.

Autumn didn't even notice how long she had been walking until she found herself on an unfamiliar street. For a minute she panicked, and then her eyes landed on a familiar restaurant. She remembered she was in West Portal, near the Muni station. She realized she could just take Muni home and not have to walk back in the dark. She strolled down the stairs and scanned her card. Luckily there was a train already there and she didn't have to wait long.

The train car was mostly empty, save for an old lady and a young couple who were both on their phones. Autumn rested her perfectly manicured hand on the seat to her right as she slid her phone into her coat pocket. Suddenly she felt a cold sticky material on her hand. "Ah!" she cried out, making everyone in the car jerk their heads in her direction. She lifted her hand and realized she had stuck it into a wad of fresh chewing gum. Her stomach flipped with disgust as she tried to wipe off any

lingering traces of it. As she did so she noticed an old book on the seat where the gum had been. For some reason she picked it up, running her fingertips over the cover and turning it over in her hands. There was no title and no author's name. The cover was made of a thick sapphire blue leather. She felt apprehensive about opening it.

Abandoning all doubts she opened the volume to the first page. When she opened the book it felt like the whole floor was falling out from under her. Everything went dark and she was falling through sapphire-colored space, as if in a nightmare. She felt her eyes fluttering shut and when she opened them again she was astounded to find herself back in the park where she had been walking not 20 minutes before. She squinted in the bright sunlight and gazed at her surroundings. It was a perfect day; families were eating lunch on blankets in the grass. She heard the sounds of birds and saw a few squirrels chase each other across the path. She decided to walk a bit further, and as she strolled she breathed deeply. Autumn was surprised to notice that the air was much clearer than she was used to. It was devoid of the usual lingering smell of cigarettes and pollution.

“Good morning,” a smiling woman running by said. Autumn saw that the sidewalks were completely clean, looking almost unreal, because they had none of the dubious stains and trash that she was used to seeing. Everything about this place seemed slightly surreal. Wanting something familiar, her only thought was of going back to her apartment.

When she arrived there the first thing she noticed was the police station, or rather the lack thereof. In her ordinary world, there was a police station right across the street from her apartment building. She crossed the street and went to examine the building that was now a bakery. She pushed open the door, hearing the bell chime above her. The store had a perfect ambiance and Autumn was greeted instantly by a woman who had a big smile on her face.

“Hello! My name is Sadie, What can I do for you?” There was something about the woman and everyone else in this strange world that had a sort of phantasmagoric quality to them that rubbed Autumn the wrong way.

“Uh,” Autumn started, “I was wondering what happened to the police station that was here. Did they tear it down?”

Sadie looked confused, “What is a Police station?”

Autumn was bewildered. “The police? They solve murders, apprehend thieves, and protect people, that sort of thing.”

The expression on Sadie’s face changed instantly from a smile to an appalled expression. “Why would anyone kill another person?” She asked, horrified, “Or steal something?”

Autumn looked at her, a bit confused, but Sadie continued, “Everyone is given everything they need. They can thrive and follow their passions. Nobody dies or gets sick, everyone has a home and people who care about them.”

Autumn stared at her, everything about this world seemed too perfect. But there was something else, something she couldn’t put her finger on that made her feel uneasy. It was like something this perfect, shouldn’t even exist. She felt a slight panic rising in her chest, “Um, I think I should leave.” Sadie stopped her, “Wait! Have a pastry before you leave!” Sadie didn’t take no for an answer and shoved a white bag into Autumn’s hands, before escorting her out of the store. Autumn peered inside the bag and didn’t immediately recognize the dessert. She took it out and sank her teeth into the soft buttery pastry. Her eyes went wide, it was the best thing she had ever tasted in her entire life. Autumn couldn’t even conceive that anything

could taste this good. She polished it off in seconds, savoring the last tastes of it.

She almost thought about going back for more, but without warning was knocked backwards. She was falling through the sidewalk into a sapphire-colored space again. She thrashed around and it felt as if she was drowning. Then, like she was coming up for air, she opened her eyes and she was in an altogether different place. She gasped, it was her old dorm room at Brown. It was immaculately cleaned, and sunlight was streaming through the open windows like ribbons. She walked to the window and saw her old friends who also had that dreamlike quality to them. They were all sitting under an enormous tree on campus laughing and talking. Then suddenly her heart skipped a beat and her stomach dropped. She saw herself; her long auburn hair blowing in the wind and her distinct laughter could be heard even from where the real Autumn was standing. The other Autumn looked better than the real Autumn had ever looked in her life. Her skin had a healthy glow to it and the way she moved was hypnotizing. She looked happy too, and so did everyone else in this strange world. All of a sudden Autumn felt a strong pang of sadness at seeing herself like this, wishing it

was real. Then it hit her, it wasn't real. If this was her idea of a perfect world, she knew it didn't exist. Grief and suffering were just a part of life, and she just had to figure out how to turn it into something beautiful, taking life as it comes. She felt tears sliding down her cheeks.

Just then, she was dragged through sapphire space again. She was falling, her body felt weightless, like she might float away. Memories of what she had seen swam around in her head-- no death, no hate, no pollution. It was a world of only beauty, love, and happiness. It was the perfect world. "This isn't real", she thought, repeating the phrase over and over. But the visions were so peaceful and blissful, she wanted to stay there forever.

Then she felt a small tug on her shoulder. Faint at first, but then more persistent. At first, Autumn resisted, not wanting to leave. But then she thought of everything she had left behind, her parents, friends, and her whole imperfect life. As the tug became stronger, she stopped resisting it and let it gently push her downwards. Into reality.

Autumn's eyes shot open and her heart was beating out of her chest. She was breathing erratically and her hands were



shaking. Her eyes focused and she looked around. She was back on the Muni. Her hand felt sticky. She looked down expecting to have the book in her hands but saw only the pink wad of gum. The doors slid open and she stood up, feeling a bit dizzy. Autumn made her way out of the station.

She walked in a daze back to her apartment and opened the door. Stumbling slightly, she made her way to the sink and cleaned the gum from her fingers. When she had finally finished washing she looked at her hands, they were scrubbed raw, but they would be okay. Her life wasn't perfect, but then again nobody's was. Feeling satisfied, she grabbed her journal and pen off her desk. Autumn did what she hadn't been able to do in months. She picked up the pen and started to write.