

A tiny ray of light escaped from between my fingers. My clasped hands glowed pinkish orange as I tried to peek in. The star blinked like brilliance itself--a flash of white, holy light. I told myself that it was a miracle that I had this star clasped in my hands. It felt warm and comforting in my palms, unlike the chilly air that held a slight mist from the waves crashing against the rocks--or shambles, I couldn't tell.

I thought of how much of a contrast the star's brilliant white light was to the utter darkness behind me, though I didn't really want to think about it. I just wanted to entertain my imagination and pretend that I wasn't sitting on a crumbling wall overlooking the sea.

Suddenly, the star zipped out of my hands, hovering in the air before me. It bloomed into the faint outline of a face. I squinted to see clearly because the image was so dim. It had the face of a young boy--a boy with beautiful blue eyes and a splatter of brown freckles on his cheeks and nose. He had an angry expression that didn't look quite right on his face, like someone was forcing two unmatching puzzle pieces together when they didn't belong. It reminded me of looking into the broken shards of a mirror, after my beloved had perished into silvery ash in my arms. Anguish had rotted out my heart then, leaving nothing left but an empty shell with no memory of a past.

The world wasn't always like this. I hadn't always been like this. Everything had been wonderful and perfect before. But now. Now, the world is unbalanced. Everything is confused. Stars, they grow on trees and taste like sweet berries. Clouds taste like cotton candy, like every child had dreamed of. Apples have wings and rabbits wear shoes. But that's on the other side of town--a door offered only to those who are fortunate enough to hold the key.

Here. Here the grass grows black. The water's frigid and the seasons are hopelessly disoriented. The leaves are just budding, the grass is dead, the flowers bloom in black and white colors.

It was a relief to see color again. Perhaps that was why the boy's face enthralled me. I followed him with my eyes like a moth would follow light. I wanted to laugh a little. What has the world come to? Stars and little boys. It's the end of the world and the world's still going. Like it gasped for breath, prolonging its last stretch before it drowned under water.

"What do you want little boy?" I asked him with half of my wretched face cupped in my hand.

His eyes weren't beautiful anymore. His pupils had turned to slits, and the color of them

reminded me of wolves and drowning in the ocean blue. I suppose that his face didn't lack entirely of beauty, though, when considered, it was a twisted sort of beauty.

"I don't know. I was hoping you'd tell me."

"Well, that's not particularly helpful. I have no idea either. Here, let's start with your name. Could you give me that at least?"

"Sapphire. Sapphire Blue. What's yours?"

I opened my mouth to speak, but no words came out. I waited a few seconds for it to come to me, until I realized that it was futile. "Well, that's funny. Honestly, I don't remember. But I suppose it's irrelevant now."

He frowned at my pessimism. "Don't you remember *anything*?"

I paused for second. "I remember. But.....I don't. I honestly don't."

"Not even a face, a reason, or a *how*?"

Threads of knowledge floated and laced through the fringes of my thoughts, but they were much too far to grasp. All that was left, was an ache of unbearable longing. I shook my head. "But why does it even matter?"

His eyebrows snapped together, and a frown distorted his face. Then his face cleared up just as suddenly, like he'd made a decision. "Are you coming?"

I thought for a second. "Where to?"

"To Somewhere, instead of the Nowhere we're in right now."

"Oh no, I couldn't possibly leave," I heard myself say.

"Come on, it's going to be wonderful."

Wonderful. I couldn't remember the last time I'd heard that word. What a strange thing to say at such a time. How could something be wonderful at world's end? "You silly boy." I reached out and ruffled his hair like everything was perfectly normal.

"Is that a yes then?" When I didn't answer, he said, "Come with me. It *is* going to be wonderful, you'll see. I promise." His expression was so earnest and pure, like untainted silver, I wanted to cry.

"You silly boy," I repeated and actually heard myself laugh--an absurd, outlandish laugh. "No, I can't go. I--" That's when what I was about to say sounded wrong and lop-sided in my head, but I said it anyways just to hear it out loud. "I can't leave this wall." I followed his surveying eyes to the scenery around us.

The terrain was so devoid of color, even fire would have sufficed to fill the gorge of my visual need. But no. There was none. Everything was colorless. It was a scene of complete destruction and devastation. The metal skeleton of skyscrapers lay limp on the ground like splinters of wood. Wrecked cars were chunked like crumpled pieces of paper. The asphalt roads were so cracked and crumbled they looked like a toss of bread crumbs and stuffing for Thanksgiving dinner.

“Can’t leave with such a stunning scenery in front of you can you? Might miss a shooting star and your chance to make a wish.” His words insinuated a spiteful undertone, too dark to be right coming from a young boy; perhaps that was why they caught my attention.

I gave him a strange look. “Actually, I’m waiting.” The words tumbled from my mouth. I had no idea what I was saying, but my lips seemed to know exactly what my mind didn’t know.

“Oh? Are you now?” He asked, not unpleasantly. His voice bright again like a young boy’s voice should sound.

“If I wait long enough, the world might decide that it doesn’t want to end anymore.” I meant it figuratively of course, but the absurdity of my sentence rang in my ears.

His laughter was hideous--too old for a boy as young as him. His alternations between different tones was beginning to confuse me. “Come come. I promise, you won’t miss a thing while we’re gone.” He tugged at my hand, and before I knew it, we were off, stumbling in an obscure direction.

It was an hour before I remembered to ask him where we were headed. By then, we were in a part of the city totally foreign to me. Which wasn't saying much, considering that I'd been nowhere except for that crumbling wall overlooking the vacant sea.

Our sneakers trudged through soft layers of ashes. It reminded me of walking through snow on Christmas morning. Except for the fact that here, the air was a cloud of grey smoke. I coughed. Then noticed how the little boy shoved a hand casually into his pocket. I watched curiously as he pulled out a key.

We walked until we stopped in front of a wall. There were black streaks on it, looking like ghosts burnt into the brick. He held up the key to the wall. Jagged rays of light shot out to form a keyhole. He pushed the silver key in, and I heard something click.

Everything happened so fast, I wasn’t sure if everything was real. Seasons rushed past

me, a million sounds, smells, and sceneries. I felt so dizzy, I curled up into a ball and touched the ground to hold myself up.

After a moment, I felt a small, cold hand on my shoulder. I looked up, feeling like a frightened child looking into Sapphire's eyes. He motioned for me to follow him, and I did. Together, we walked into winter, then stepped into summer, spring, and fall. The leaves were on fire, then they died, and dissolved into the air as if placed in water. The scenery changed constantly. I couldn't figure out if it was because of the distance covered by our tired feet, or the fickleness of the landscape.

That's when I figured it out. We were on the Other Side of town. Where the clouds tasted like cotton candy; where the rabbits wore shoes.

I whirled, searching for a tree. I spotted a sapling and ran to it, ripping off the tender cotton clouds from its year-old branches.

I shoved the clouds down my throat, eating it so fast, its raw, bitter taste didn't flood my mouth until my third swallow. I ate as if my happiness depended on it. When it dawned on me that it was useless, I felt the tears claw their way up my throat and spill down my cheeks. I swallowed four more times before I crumpled to the ground.

There was no hope. What could I expect? The world was in shambles. Everything was so confused; the elements were so off-balance, nothing seemed to know what to do, or the intent for its original purpose. It was unsalvageable; I was never going to get my old life back.

I sat on the ground, crying for what felt like hours. When my eyes went dry and I became tired of rocking myself back and forth, I got up and moved to where Sapphire had started a fire. He handed me a blanket. I was so tired, I didn't even ask where he'd found it. I took it from him and laid down. Before I knew it, I fell into the clutches of deep sleep.

I woke to the sound of bird calls. Millions of them. I blinked and sluggishly got up. Sapphire was circling a tall pine tree, grand with full branches and crisp pine-needles. I walked up to him, still wrapped in the blanket. "What are you doing?" I asked, noting his determined expression.

"Catching a bird." He pounced at one of the fluttering birds, but it was much too fast. He missed, toppling into the snow.

I smiled a little. Then turned away to walk back to the fire. I squatted by the dying coals that were still glowing orange from the remaining fire. All of the sudden, I felt a gentle tap tap on

my shoulder. I slowly turned my head, then saw a small sparrow out of the corner of my eye. It perched itself on my shoulder as if it belonged there. We sat like that for awhile: me staring at the sparrow, wondering what it was thinking, while it stared patiently back at me.

Then a pair of hands swatted at it, rude and rough. I leaped up as Sapphire scrambled to grab hold of the bird. It fluttered, and he grasped at its feathers, barely catching hold. Feathers loosened into his hands, and still he whirled his hands like a madman. The chase ranged all the way across from the fire to the trees. I could see that the bird was trying to fly to its nest--the one with three perfectly round blue eggs. "Stop! Let it be." I yelled at him. The feathers went up like puffs of smoke.

Finally, Sapphire caught firmly onto the bird. He sat down like a toddler content with his toy. It fluttered and writhed to get out of his grasp.

I felt a certain pity for the bird, so I approached Sapphire, hoping to persuade him to be more gentle with it. As I neared, I noticed the puddle of feathers around him, and his fingers busy plucking. There were feathers everywhere. I screamed. "What are you doing?! Stop! Stop it!"

His body jerked upwards into a standing position, genuinely startled by the urgency and anguish in my voice. He stared innocently up at me. "I like its feathers."

"No! Let it be! Let it go!" When he did nothing, I slapped at his arm.

He released his grip, but it was too high off the ground. The bird fell onto the ground with a sickening crunching sound. Then redness started to spread. "Oh god." I breathed, panic starting to seep in.

He gasped, staring at the bird for a second. Then he stooped down and poked at it with his bare hands. When he lifted his hands up to see, they were stained with blood. He looked at those hands, and a dark expression crossed over his face like a storm cloud with high voltage. "You wanted me to let it go." He said very softly. "And I did. Now look what happened. His feathers are all dirty and wet." He was outraged. I could see violent lightning in his eyes.

I fell backwards, and crawled away from him. Words tumbled and fell from my lips as I scrambled with what to do.

White light began to shine brilliantly about his head like a halo. He floated upwards, till his feet left the ground and he hovered ten feet up in the air. His eyes were glowing orbs of vacantness. He was shining so brightly, he suddenly burst into a million bright, lovely pieces.

I was taken aback by the suddenness of it all. But the beauty of it mesmerized me. The birds still chirped as noisily as ever, and the trees still changed from a lively red to a tender, mildly beautiful green. I gazed up at the white sparks, and an odd thought crossed my mind.

Who knew something as wretched as a demented little boy could be so beautiful? I laughed and reached out to grab one of the million flakes of holy whiteness. It crumbled like silver ash in my hands. I closed my eyes, and let it land on my nose and mix in with my hair like melted snowflakes.

I suddenly realized that the boy had kept his promise.

The world was off. The world was so terribly, terribly, lopsided and off. Even he was wrong. But through the wrongness of him, I discovered the wonderfulness left in this world. And for the first time in a long while, I felt strangely content.

Off to my right, I heard something crack and crinkle. I turned my head, and noticed three little blue eggs nudging itself to the start of a new life. And it was wonderful to see life at its first breath, even at world's end.