

The background of the cover features a silhouette of a person with their hair in a bun, sitting on a wooden pier or railing. They are looking out over a body of water towards a sunset with a purple and orange sky. Above the sunset, the sky is dark blue with many small white stars, suggesting a night sky. The title 'AUTUMN'S DAWN' is written in large, stylized letters across the top. 'AUTUMN'S' is in a yellow-to-orange gradient with a red outline, and 'DAWN' is in white with a red outline. Two thin red horizontal lines are positioned above and below the title.

AUTUMN'S DAWN

PathFinders

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
available upon request.

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Cover and interior design: John Wincek



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7th Generation
Book Publishing Company
PO Box 99, Summertown, TN 38483
888-260-8458
bookpubco.com
nativevoicesbooks.com

ISBN: 978-1-939053-25-1

25 24 23 22 21 20 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

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RESOURCES

Happy Reunion

Autumn sighed. With a jolt, her head hit the truck's window for the third time. She rubbed the painful spot and then adjusted the small blanket she had propped up against the window. Her mother had packed the blanket, as well as several other items, in her duffel bag for the trip, and she had promptly taken it out as soon as she had gotten into the rickety old truck. She closed her eyes, trying to block out the sun that was shining in through the windows, and yawned. It had already been a long day.

Her father, Tom, was sprawled out next to her, driving. He had picked her up very early that morning and had waited somewhat impatiently for Autumn to get ready. Now he was weaving in and out of traffic as he passed cars with boats hitched to them heading for the lake in the other direction.

They had been on the road for what seemed like forever. Autumn knew they had at least an hour to go before they arrived in Minneapolis and got to Aunt Jessie's apartment. She clutched the duffel bag she had refused to put in the back seat and sat up now, letting the blanket drop into her lap.

"Are we there yet?" she asked, her mouth twitching as she tried not to smile.

"Yup ... get out."

Autumn grinned and then laughed. She knew he would say that. They were going about sixty miles an hour down the highway at the moment.

It was a game they started playing when she was a child, and it always made her laugh. She glanced out the window and then shook her head.

"Ah, no thank you," she replied with a grin. "But, Dad, I have to go to the bathroom."

He sighed and shook his head. "I just passed several places to go," he replied, frowning over at her. "You'll have to wait until we get to the next town."

"When's that?"

"About twenty minutes or so."

"Okay. So can we get something to eat there too?"

Tom shook his head. "Your aunt has lunch waiting for you."

"I'm hungry."

Tom smiled. "If I know my sister, she'll have plenty of food. She is so excited you're coming."

"I wish I could stay longer."

"Me too. But you have to get back for tutoring or you won't pass this year."

Autumn grimaced. "I worked as hard as I could ..."

"I know," interrupted her father, putting on his blinker to pass someone. "But they discovered your dyslexia too late in the year." He sighed. "I wish you had said something earlier."

"I was embarrassed. I didn't want anyone to know how stupid I was."

Tom took his eyes off the road to glance at her for a moment, then moved his gaze back to the road.

"You're not stupid, Autumn. Am I stupid? I'm dyslexic too."

When Autumn didn't answer, he sighed. "Look, I think the best thing to do is let the school help you. The tutoring staff will teach you different ways to learn, and school will hopefully become easier for you."

"I guess."

"Oh, hang on. I forgot about this gas station. Let's pull in here to use the bathroom and get a drink."

Tom pulled into the large gas station parking lot as Autumn finally threw her backpack into the back seat.

Ten minutes later they were back on the road again. Autumn pulled her music out and put her earbuds in. Prince's music came through them, and she closed her eyes.

As she sat back, her thoughts returned to the last couple of months. School had gone better as the teachers worked with her more, but she hadn't caught up by the end of the year. She was given a week off, and

after that she had to go back for two weeks of tutoring. If she did well with the tutoring, they would pass her into the next grade.

She wasn't the only one going back, though. She'd heard that Sydney, the girl who had bullied her all last school year, was also going to have to attend. Autumn wondered what Sydney's father thought about that. He was a tough man to like.

She and Sydney hadn't spoken after the Jingle Dress play they did in the spring, but she'd heard rumors about Sydney's parents breaking up. The girl had become very quiet toward the end of the year, and Autumn felt sorry for her. Sydney and her friends had stopped bothering Autumn for the moment, and she was glad for that.

Autumn opened her eyes to glance over at her father. He had been making regular visits to the house to see her and Sam, Autumn's baby brother. Sometimes her mom was there and sometimes she was at work, but it was always prearranged. Even though her father was trying to make things work with her mother, they weren't as close as he would like them to be. Her mother told him she was not ready to reconcile. She had started to date other people, which had not made her father very happy. He was still holding out for his happy ending, which included having Autumn's mother and his family back. But Autumn's mother was obviously ready to move on.

Autumn had watched her mother blossom into a more independent woman in the last couple of months. She had taken over almost all the chores Autumn had been doing and was more present in everyone's lives. Autumn was proud of her and told her so. That being said, she didn't know how she felt about her mother dating. Autumn was aware of the wistful smiles when her mother returned home from the dates. She was enjoying herself and dating made her happy, which Autumn was in full support of. When Autumn asked her mother about the dates, she replied that she was keeping things casual, and Autumn had left it at that.

Autumn moved her gaze back to the window and drifted off to sleep a few minutes later. After an hour or so, her father gave her a quick poke as they pulled into the parking lot of Jessie's apartment building.

"We're here," he said as he put the truck in park. Autumn sat up sleepily and pushed her hair back out of her face.

They were sitting in front of a large brick apartment complex that consisted of several buildings. There were flower gardens scattered around, and even a fountain with a statue of a little girl holding an umbrella. Water was shooting up through the umbrella handle and coming out the top to rain down on the open umbrella.

“This place looks rich,” muttered Autumn, grabbing her backpack out of the back seat.

“Jessie likes to be in the center of things,” replied her father getting out of the car. “This neighborhood has great shopping and restaurants. They also have specialty shops, and she has some beadwork in them for sale.”

“Really? That’s cool.”

“I think so too. Oh, there’s your aunt now, waving at us.” He pointed to his right, and there was Jessie, waving her hands and running toward them. A smile broke across Autumn’s face, and she dropped her backpack and ran to meet her.

“Oh, I am so happy to see you,” said Jessie, hugging Autumn tightly. “You have grown at least a foot since I last saw you.”

Autumn beamed as her father strode up and gave his sister a hug.

“Boozoo, little brother,” Jessie said with a grin. “Long time, no see.”

Tom grimaced and shook his head. “You just saw me yesterday. And when are you moving back to the rez? This is a long trip.”

Jessie shook her head. “You make it all the time. And my life is here now.”

“Our people are nomadic.”

“*Some* of our people are nomadic,” she answered. “I am not.”

Autumn went over to the truck, picked up her backpack, and followed her father as Jessie led them inside.

Her aunt’s apartment was big, with white walls and colorful furniture. A tidy place, it had Native paintings covering the walls and some of Jessie’s beadwork tapestries as well. She had a large balcony overlooking the fountain. Autumn opened the sliding glass door and stepped outside. The whole place was beautiful, and Autumn understood why Jessie was not eager to move back to the reservation.

“It’s a whole different world here,” said Autumn. “I can hear cars and truck noise, honking horns, and people laughing and talking on the other

balconies. It's a different kind of sociable here."

"I'm leaving," announced her father a few moments later.

"What? Why?" asked Autumn, turning from the outside view. "You're not eating lunch with us?"

"I have to get to work," he replied. "I picked up an extra shift today."

"Well, let me at least pack food up for you," said Jessie, and she got busy doing so.

"Okay, well, thanks for bringing me here," said Autumn.

Tom nodded, walking outside to join her. "I will return next Saturday afternoon. Your mom is expecting you home at a reasonable time."

Autumn nodded. "I think she has a date, and I need to babysit."

A shadow fell over Tom's face. "Yeah." He sighed. "I wish things were different," he grumbled.

Autumn hesitated a moment and then replied, "I just want her to be happy. She was unhappy for such a long time."

Tom nodded. "I know. I want that for her too. I just wish she could be happy with me and not some other guy. I really blew it when I left."

"I'm sorry, Dad."

"Yeah, me too."

Tom gave Autumn a kiss on the forehead and headed back inside. He grabbed the bag of food from his sister and then headed for the door. He pulled it open, then turned to smile and wave before he headed to his truck.

Jessie caught the unhappy look on Autumn's face, and she went to give her a hug.

"There's nothing you can do about it," she reminded her. "Those two will have to figure things out on their own. You have your own life to lead."

"I know."

"Now, let's eat," said Jessie, pulling back to smile at her. "I want to hear all about what's been happening at school."

Autumn smiled and followed her to the table. She took a banana and started to peel it. She took a bite and closed her eyes, savoring the taste. She loved bananas.

Five minutes later, the doorbell rang. Autumn was just starting to fill her plate when her aunt got up to answer it.

Jessie pulled the door open with a grin. “What did you forget now, Tom? Oh, it’s you. I didn’t expect you today, Ryan.”

“I know,” he replied. “I took a chance you might be home. I thought maybe we could go to Como Zoo.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. I have my niece for the week and ...”

“Zoo? I love the zoo,” said Autumn.

She came around the corner to see a tall blond man with green eyes standing just inside the door of the apartment. His wavy hair was cut short, and he wore jeans and a tucked-in, short-sleeved, button-down brown shirt.

“Hello,” he said with a smile. “I’m Ryan. I’m a friend of Jessie’s.”

“Friend?”

“Well, I would like to think of myself as her boyfriend, but she likes to play the field,” he answered with a grin, and Jessie shook her head.

“You can stop talking about me as if I wasn’t here,” she said, giving him a stern look. “And we are dating.”

“We have been *dating* for two years,” he pointed out. “I would like us to move ahead, but Jessie’s as slow as a turtle when it comes to those things.”

Autumn grinned. “Well, it is nice to meet you. We were just sitting down for lunch. Would you like to join us?”

Ryan gave Jessie a smile. “I would love to.”

“Autumn, don’t encourage him,” whispered Jessie, pushing the door shut as he walked in and rounded the corner to the dining room.

“It doesn’t seem like he needs too much encouragement,” Autumn whispered back. “And he is cute.”

“Cute? When did you start noticing boys?”

“Just now.”

Jessie laughed. “Okay, girl. Get a hold of yourself. Let’s get back to the table before he eats everything in sight. You don’t know what you’ve done inviting him to lunch.”

“Are you mad about it? I probably should have asked first.”

“No, it’s okay.”

Autumn sat down next to Ryan, and Jessie sat across from them. As Ryan caught Jessie’s eye, he winked, and she blushed and looked away.

Autumn hid a grin as she reached over to grab a biscuit. No, it didn’t seem like Jessie minded Ryan being here one bit.

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