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XXIX
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WHEN THE SKY CHANGES ITS COLOR

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“Tell me Julia! Is the sky still the same color or has it changed since yesterday?” Those were always his first words when he saw me at school. It has been more than 60 years since we studied together at St. James Academy in Morganton, West Virginia, but the sound of his voice sounds now clearer than ever in my head.

We were called “the outsiders, the weirdos and the geeks”. But the truth is that we were just different. We didn’t play what other kids used to play, partly because Ed couldn’t but mostly because we didn’t want to. We preferred to spend our days lying on the grass with our heads facing the clouds rather than playing hide and seek. We preferred to listen to bird songs rather than to play pranks on our classmates. And I can assure you that we had more fun.

“Oh, there they go! The blind kid and his nurse” They used to tell us all the time, but the truth is that we couldn’t care less about those commentaries. Being a kid is easy, you can just ignore the criticism of others because you think that being yourself makes you important enough and you are convinced that no one has the power to make you feel less valuable.

But life involves growing up, growing up involves becoming more mature, and sometimes becoming more mature is the worst thing that could ever happen to you.

You forget that dreams are important, you start to care about others' opinions, you start to hang out with the "popular kids" and most importantly: you let society change who you truly are.

I still remember the last time I saw Ed, it was the day before I left Morganton, West Virginia to go to college. I visited him to say goodbye. It had been months since we had last talked. He recognized my footsteps as soon as I approached his porch, and he greeted me with his usual phrase: "Tell me Julia! Is the sky still the same color or has it changed since yesterday?" I laughed, trying to hide my regret and melancholy, but suddenly stopped when I saw the canvas he had in front of him: he had painted a purple clear sky with orange clouds, and that was one of the most magnificent and meaningful works of art I would ever see in my entire life.

I went off to college and kept in touch with Ed through letters that he wrote with the help of his mother using a writing machine, it usually took us months to reply. One day I received a different letter; I could sense it because it had a different greeting. I opened the envelope to find a small paragraph written by his mom telling me he had passed away 6 months earlier.

Wherever I look I just see the same: purple skies with orange clouds. It's like the universe is conspiring to show me exactly what I don't want to break away from. Reality is blinding me, I feel like it wants to remind me that regardless of what my eyes show me, what really matters is what I choose to see. This is what Ed taught me with the way in which he perceived the world: with no eyes but from the inside.

I visited his family as soon as I returned to Morganton and they gave me the painting that I saw that summer before I went to college. They said he had left it for me. On the back part of it, he wrote with the same typography of his writing machine: "Life is given to you as a blank canvas, and it is up to you to transform your reality choosing your colors wisely".