*1st day of October*

I noticed her at once. At that moment when I walked under the gate, my eyes found her. She was different than the others. She sat on the grass under a tree and actually *was* there. A lot of people who come to the park leave their minds at work or home and think only about themselves. And that girl was touching the grass with her fingers, carefully, accurately. Like she really wanted to remember how the blades felt against her pale skin, like she really wanted to keep in memory their shape and length. She slowly pulled one blade out and raised it up, breathing the smell in. And she smiled. Just because she found the smell nice. People don’t do such things, it’s hard for them to enjoy small things these days. So this girl was different, I had to admit. I stood and stared at her for what felt like quite a long time, but she didn’t seem to notice. It was a bit unnerving, woke some incomprehensible fear in me, but I shrugged it off since I couldn’t think of any cause for it. I started walking towards her, slowly, not wanting to scare her away. I don’t know what, but there was something about her posture that made her seem shy and easily frightened. She seemed something about sixteen, but looked so fragile and delicate with this pale face and a bit too long hair so light, it was almost white. She was dressed in a blue dress which looked ridiculous on her – she was too skinny and too short for it. The sleeves were too long, going past the palm of her hands and generally the whole thing kind of hung loose on her. But, in some strange way, it was still pretty nice, really. Half of the girl’s face was covered with the brim of her huge, yellow hat. I was facing her and she still didn’t raise her head. She was sitting on the grass, barefoot, playing with the blades of grass and I stood in front of her rather awkwardly, not really sure what to do next. Suddenly all this situation hit me with its oddity. I approached the girl with no better reason than my own oh-so smart remark that she was “different than other people”. It sounded hilarious, but was actually rather absurd than funny. I rubbed the back of my neck, embarrassed. She still hasn’t looked up. Suddenly, I heard her chuckle. “You may sit with me, if you want to” she said quietly. She had such a nice voice, so calm and delicate. And I could almost hear a smile in it. I mumbled a “thank you” and quickly sat down, straightening my legs. We sat in silence for a moment until I finally dared to ask: “What’s your name?” The girl sighed. I frowned, waiting for her answer. I don’t know why she hesitated. “Edna” she answered eventually, her voice unsure. “My name is Edna. Yours?” “Claire” I replied, flashing her a reassuring smile. I don’t know has she even seen it, though. Because of the enormous hat and all. “Do you come here often? Haven’t seen you before.” She shook her head slowly. She looked like she was thinking of an answer. Warily choosing words. “No, I... I can’t come too often. I usually don’t feel well enough.” I didn’t know what was that supposed to mean, but I let it drop anyway, because Edna hadn’t finished yet. “Although, if I only could, I’d come here everyday” she smiled and it was a cute smile, a bit childish, so hopeful, almost naive. “It’s so beautiful, no matter the season or the weather. Birds are singing, and the grass, it is so soft!” She hummed happily, dipping both her hands in the grass. I smiled at her. Edna was like a child. When she finally broke the ice, she couldn’t stop talking. About anything. The surroundings, how the leaves looked, how many trees she thought grew in the whole park, how many people visited it during one day, how many dogs were running around the lawns at the moment... I didn’t have to say much, she covered for both of us. And listening to her was nice, in some way. She didn’t talk about anything serious, not really. But the way she talked, that was important. She paid attention to the smallest of things, details which people normally tend to forget about, details which our whole world consists of.

*2nd day of October*

Today, when I went to the park I did it only in hope of seeing Edna. I wasn’t disappointed. She sat in the same place as yesterday, dressed in the same funny, yellow hat and a lilac dress. This one was too large as well, of course. “Hey” I greeted her, sitting on the ground next to her. She didn’t react in any way, though. I frowned, looking at her more attentively, trying not to miss anything. Edna sat with her legs crossed, holding a tiny flower in her linked hands. She was stroking it with her fingertips, exploring every leaf, every petal. I raised an eyebrow. “What are you doing?” I asked curiously. Edna didn’t respond at once, but she never did. I already got used to that after this one, short conversation we had yesterday. Words were important to her. She said they carried much more meaning than people usually thought. I didn’t say anything to that because I couldn’t really think of a sensible reply. Words meant... what they meant, right? One thing, exactly and only that what someone once decided they do. And... nothing more. Well, at least not for Edna. “Watching” she answered eventually. I barely suppressed a snort. “Oh yeah? It’s a flower. What else? What is there to watch?” Edna made an annoyed sound. When she spoke, her voice sounded like she was explaining something for a hundredth time to a very dull kid. “What is there to watch? Oh, Clairey!” I started at the nickname. Edna just shook her head. “What colour it is?” She asked, raising up the small plant she still held between her two fingers. I raised my eyebrows, puzzled. “What?” I asked, not really wisely, I know. Edna just *hmphed.*  “Just tell me. What colour is it?” She repeated the question, irritation clear in her voice. “Purple” I shrugged. It was. But for some stupid, unknown to me reason, it wasn’t enough as for an answer for Edna. “Nah. It can’t be *just purple”* she said, deadly serious and I really had trouble fighting the urge to shout: “Well, then you have a problem here, because what if it actually is?” “Tell me more. Try to... state it more... precisely, will you?” I sighed, rolling my eyes. It didn’t make any sense to me, sure, but still... I was curious what Edna had on her mind. “Alright then. So it’s...” I was thinking for a minute. “The same colour as your dress” it really was. So I didn’t know why, on Earth, Edna burst out laughing. “I have no idea what colour my dress is, Clairey” she managed, giggling. I frowned at her, but she didn’t seem to care. “Try something different. Describe it.” “Well... It’s... It’s a nice colour” I begun, rather lamely. “Light, pastel. It’s lilac, purple mixed with white. It’s the colour of... crocuses, but a little bit more pink, I think. It’s like violets, but lighter, whiter. And like forget-me-nots, just not the blue ones, but...” Edna started to giggle again and I stopped, blushing. It was embarrassing and I didn’t really know why, it just... was. “See? It’s difficult. And interesting, actually. You think you know what you’re talking about, but then, when I ask for some details, your mind suddenly goes completely blank” she smiled that tiny, mysterious smile of hers. “Try it sometime. To explain what something looks like to someone who hasn’t seen it before. And avoid those simple phrases like ‘it’s green’ or ‘it’s small’. Even if it is. Try comparing. And, um, do something with your observation skills, they’re awful.” I looked at her, stunned. What? She seemed to notice my amazement because she smiled sweetly, slightly shaking her head. “You compared *this* to *crocuses”* she said with disapproval in her voice. *Disapproval.* Seriously. “So I guess they have to be awful. But they usually are, people can’t watch. They have eyes and still they don’t use them, not properly. It’s rare to meet someone with good observation skills” she seemed so serious, so intrigued. I noticed it before, she paid so much attention to the details. Of everything. Small things I’d take as unimportant, meaningless. She said even the biggest of things were built of the small, tiny ones. I had to agree with her there, that was true. So why not pay attention to the details since they’d lead to hugeness either way? I didn’t know a rational answer. “But don’t worry” all of a sudden, Edna patted my shoulder lightly. Surprised, I started at the touch and she took her hand away quickly. But stayed turned at me so I took it as a good sign. Yesterday she probably didn’t look at me even once. I looked up at her. I felt how my lips form a smile. She looked funny with this hat covering her forehead, her whole eyes and the half of her nose. I only saw pale cheeks, thin, pink lips and a skinny chin. “About those skills I was talking about, don’t you worry” she explained, probably noticing that I kind of lost her drift. “Because mine are even worse” she smiled sadly. I raised an eyebrow, – who knows how many times I’ve already done it today – mutely asking for a better explanation, but Edna remained silent. I sighed quietly. She was weird. But... I liked her. Very much. As I noticed at the very beginning, yesterday, to be clear, she was different. Edna was different than other people or, better to say, than the majority of other people. Different than me. It was an odd type of different, but really, was there any other type of it? The only thing left to decide was, was it a good difference or a bad one? I remember how I looked at Edna at that moment. She was smiling so brightly, leaning back so she could expose her face to the sun. A gentle breeze blew through her hair. I noticed a few freckles on her morbidly pale nose. How could I ever consider Edna as anything bad? She looked like a happy child at that moment. I wish people were as happy as her because of such small things as the sunbeam.

*3rd day of October*

Today, I met with Edna again. When I came to the park she was already there, sitting on the grass as usually, barefoot, dressed in her hilarious hat and a dress. It was green this time. *No, not green,* I thought to myself. *Think of something different, more difficult. Don’t take the easy way.* Describing, right. *And... improve your “awful observation skills, Clairey”,* I added with a smirk. So. Edna’s dress was light. It was a nice shade of green, delicate, pastel. Some would call it mint, but it was even brighter. I tilted my head to the side. It reminded me of... toothpaste, I stated after a while. Toothpaste, marshmallows, Easter eggs and those rubber, colourful hair ties. I don’t even know why, it just did. And I got a strange feeling Edna would like it. She wouldn’t ask for an explanation, she’d just appreciate the fact I can describe the colour of her dress in some way, even if I used strange examples. She’d understand. I sat on the grass beside her and took a deep breath, tasting the air. It smelt like plants around us, like the ground we sat on. I smiled slightly, letting my eyes to close. “Hi” I mumbled. I heard Edna’s chuckle. “Hello, Claire. How was school?” I blinked in surprise. We hadn’t talked about it before, I was sure I hadn’t even mentioned it. But, well, Edna somehow knew. She always knew. “Well... it was fine, I guess. Plain. It’s always the same, you know. Nothing chan-” “The thing is, I don’t” she bit her lip. “I don’t know, Clairey. I don’t know how it is to go to school.” “You don’t?!” I looked at her in disbelief. When she shook her head sadly, I cleared my throat awkwardly. Suddenly I didn’t know what to say and what wouldn’t sound forced or weird. She seemed... sad. And I’ve never met anyone who would be sad if they didn’t go to school. “Um... Well, there’s nothing to be jealous about, I’m telling you. And why, if I may ask...” Edna sighed, rubbing her temples as if she was trying to get rid of a headache. “I just can’t. It would be too difficult, the doctors say I wouldn’t manage on my own.” The doctors? I stared at her, wide-eyed, but didn’t press. People don’t like talking about such things, I know. So I just dropped the topic. “So... Edna, you’ve asked about my day. There’s nothing much to know, really. I took my classes, then ate take out lunch. How about you? For how long have you been here?” I really wanted to sound natural. “Not so long. A few hours, or so. I wanted to wait for you so I stayed.” I felt how some warm, pleasant feeling spreads through my chest. “Wait for me?” I asked, smiling brightly. Edna was... just too sweet. Her words were always careful, she chose them warily. She could give them meaning no one would ever suspect that they had. I think she knew about words a lot more than I do. So I couldn’t understand her, sometimes. I wish I could, though. “Yes. You’re funny, I like talking to you. And spending my time with you” she said, so simply, so straightforwardly. “So yeah, I was waiting for you. Why? You seem so surprised.” I only shook my head. *Why?* As it was obvious. Well, for me it wasn’t. Because she could do everything she wanted to and she decided to wait for me. She wanted to spend her time with me, to waste it on idle waiting. People don’t do that these days. People are always busy, in a rush, they never have time. They have meetings, reports, deadlines. And there’s Edna, a girl who doesn’t go to school, who can wait for hours just to meet with you. Unbelievable. Suddenly, an unknown voice rang out, distracting me from my thoughts. I looked up, curious where the voice came from. Edna raised her head too, looking around. She seemed a bit dazed. I tried to shield my eyes from the sunlight with a hand, blinking. Finally, I noticed a little girl. She was running towards us, grinning happily. The wind played with her long, messy hair, she grabbed the pink fabric of her dress in her hands. She was the one to scream. But it was a happy sound, filled with laughter, probably already bubbling in the girl's throat, wanting to break free and spread through the air. I smiled in her direction, noticing a skinny, tall woman with long legs and neck. She was laughing too while running down the nearest alley. She looked around, carefully. Looking for the child. Her daughter, probably. The girl stopped in front of us, panting heavily. “You have to help me hide. Here” she said, sounding very serious. “Or she’s going to catch me” she pointed at the woman who was already on our lawn. “We can’t have that, can we?” Edna smiled lazily, looking at the girl, who chuckled. “Nope. At least, not yet. She’s said she’s going to catch me in five minutes. I’ve said she’s going to need more time. I can’t lose the bet. If I do, she won’t buy me *any* ice cream!” She sounded very serious. She even looked me in the eye, searching for understanding. I barely suppressed a laugh, trying to look terrified. “Any ice cream?” Edna’s voice betrayed her – she suppressed a laugh. “Yes!” The girl nodded earnestly. Edna flashed her a broad smile. “Then it’s settled. Come here” she made an urgent gesture. The child sat between us and I passed her my jacket. The girl hid under it, satisfied. “Thank you” she whispered. “Maybe I could take you for ice cream with us. You know, as a gesture of gratitude” she used funny words. I smiled, feeling how the girl snuggled closer to me. “What’s your name?” Edna asked her, whispering. “Beth. That” she reached out from behind my jacket and gestured towards the young woman who was currently looking under one of the trees. “is my stepmom, Caroline. But she’s fine, you’ll like her. And what are your names?” “I’m Claire” I said, nudging Beth lightly. I saw a slight move when she nodded. “And my name’s Edna” Edna added, smiling. Beth hummed in response. “Claire and Edna. Nice” she muttered. “And what are you doing here. Hiding, too?” Beth asked. She had a lot of questions. “No, cutie pie. We’re talking. Exchanging opinions. Watching...” “Watching?” Beth was so surprised that she even forgot about the fact Caroline was looking for her and she peeked out from behind my jacket. She had a puzzled, frowned expression on her face. “I guess, *you’re* watching, right?” She pointed at me. I raised an eyebrow, not really getting what she meant. “Why?” I asked. Beth sighed, looking annoyed. “Because she can’t, that is. She’s blind.” What? *What?!* I opened my mouth, ready to oppose, but... I didn’t say anything. Beth looked at me, clearly waiting with this smart expression “Seriously, Claire? Seriously?” on. She sighed dramatically. I looked at Edna, searching for an explanation, but she had her head turned in a different direction. Even, if she was theoretically looking at me, in fact, she wouldn’t, right? It felt like a punch in the face. Blind. How could I have been so dumb?! So... ignorant. Obvious. Edna never really hid it. Suddenly, a lot of images filled my mind. I don’t know why I didn’t notice them before. Signs. They were right in front of me, just waiting to be seen, noticed, understood. A lot of signs. The images flowed through my mind, images formed from small lights, twinkling against a backdrop of nothing. Edna touching the blades of grass with her fingertips. Carefully, attentively. Edna stroking the flower’s petal. Edna laughing, while telling me that she has no idea what colour her dress is. Edna smiling sadly when she told me about her “observation skills”. Last morning, when I asked her what she was doing, she answered “Watching”. And how? How could she, if she was... blind. I frowned. Beth. “How did you...?” “There you are!” Caroline appeared right in front of us. I didn’t notice her, lost in my own thoughts. The woman outstretched her arms. Beth sighed deeply, slowly standing up. “Alright, you won” she stated, unpleased. “But” she raised her forefinger, adding more importance to her words. “Next time, it’s not going to be that easy. And...” she smiled innocently “you can still buy me ice cream” Caroline laughed. “Okay. I will” she smiled at Beth. The girl squealed, grabbing Caroline’s hand quickly. The woman looked at me and Edna, apologies clear in her big, brown eyes. She pursed her lips. “I’m sorry for her. I hope she hasn’t caused too much trouble...” “No, don’t worry” I heard Edna’s voice. She sounded as calm as always, but... sad. “She’s a nice kid.” “I’m not a kid!” Beth revolted against her words. “I’m seven! And half!” “Of course” Edna agreed without hesitation. “She’s very smart. It was great talking to her, don’t worry” she flashed Caroline a reassuring smile. The woman breathed a sigh of relief. “Well then. Come on, Beth” Caroline took a step backwards. “Goodbye. Have a nice day!” “Bye, Edna” Beth squeezed Edna’s hand slightly. “We’ll go for ice cream another time, I promise. Bye, Claire” She looked at me seriously, shaking her head. “Really. You could’ve been at least a bit less dense...” “Beth! Stop it!” Caroline interrupted her, terrified. “That was very rude, young girl. Say you’re sorry.” “No, no, it’s fine” I shook my head. “There’s no need to say sorry because Beth’s right. Don’t be mad at her, please” I flashed the girl a small smile. “She really deserves the dessert.” Caroline nodded. I don’t think I’ve convinced her, but she didn’t argue. She just led Beth away. Quickly. I heard her saying something to the girl, pulling hard at her arm. Scolding her, probably. I took a shaky breath. She could have stayed. To scold me as well. “Edna...” I whispered. It was a horrible feeling. My mind was blank, I had no idea what I could say. I felt like throwing up. I knew I had to do something. Anything. At least try. But I had no idea how and still I really wanted to somehow show Edna that I’m sorry. It was terrifying. What was I even sorry for? My own stupidity? Well, yeah, but there was no excuse for it. “I thought you knew.” I heard her voice. “I thought it was so... evident. I wondered why you didn’t mention it, but I didn’t press, you know. Even if I’m over it and all, talking about it is never nice. I always feel so weird. And people always ask stupid questions, like “If you’re blind, what do you see in your sleep, then?” Seriously. It’s just dumb” she sighed, rubbing her temples. “So I didn’t bring it up. But still... I was sure you know! I made myself believe that you’ve noticed and you don’t mind, you don’t treat me different because of it!” She slowly raised her hand and touched the brim of her hat. “Well, I was mistaken. I have no idea how you managed not to see that I’m blind, Clairey.” She shook her head in disbelief. “But I think I was right about the observation skills of yours.” “But... But Beth, she...” I barely managed. Edna remained silent, thinking of an answer. “Children are different, Claire. They are wiser than adults, they see. I mean, they really see. They notice the details, pay attention to small things and they understand them. They can solve riddles better than anyone else, you know why? Because riddles are usually tricky and children, unlike the adults, think of every possible solution. Or impossible, however you want to call it. They aren’t rational. And when a girl is sitting alone under a tree, playing with the grass, turning her head in a lot of directions, following the sounds, looking like she was really seeing something, for a child she still can be blind. A child won’t think she isn’t just because she doesn’t seem to be. And I don’t think I’m a good actress, anyway. I don’t pretend. I’ve already learnt that it doesn’t lead anywhere. When you tell the truth after a long time of hiding, when you can’t pretend anymore so you decide to spill the beans, the reaction is always the same. Shock. People who feel deluded don’t trust you anymore. And the sudden realization is somehow too much for them so they leave, they always leave. I thought it would be better then, not to pretend. But it’s not, of course it isn’t. People are afraid of disability. Even the slightest. They treat you differently and they don’t understand it doesn’t cause anything good. They act weirdly around you. They can be your doctors, sure. But not your friends, never. And it’s...” she sobbed quietly. “It’s just sad. I always hope there will be someone different. Someone, who doesn’t care if I can’t see colours, but notice that I can describe them. I could live normally. Because it’s not impossible. Not difficult even. But what is difficult is making people believe that. Making them believe that I can live just like they do. And there’s no need to treat me like, I don’t even know, an alien” she took a deep breath, trying to calm down. “You know, I thought you’re different. I really did. And then it turns out that you just didn’t know!” I’m sure I’ve never felt so bad in my entire life. Her words, every single one of them, felt like daggers thrown with perfect accuracy and thrust sorrowfully deep. She was right, of course she was right. It was Edna, after all. Edna. All soft smiles and calm words. Edna who waited for hours just to meet with me, even, if she had never seen my face. Until I spoke up, she hadn’t even known if I was a girl. When I had approached her, she hadn’t seen me. She hadn’t known who I am or what I want. She hadn’t known how old I am, how I look like, why I came to her. And she had spoken first. She had invited me to sit with her. “You may sit with me, if you want to”, she had said. She had trusted me, although she hadn’t had any reason to do that. “I haven’t treated you differently” I whispered, afraid to speak any louder. Edna shrugged. “You haven’t known. Maybe you don’t pay attention. That would explain why you haven’t noticed I wear this” she pointed at her hat “all the time.” Her words hurt. But I knew I deserved it. And I knew she had all rights to be pissed. The thing was, she wasn’t. Pissed, angry even. Not at all. She was sad and hurt and that affected me even more than if she was yelling. So I had to make it up to her at all costs. Get the last chance. “I do, Edna. I care” I whispered in a shaky, weak voice. Edna just sighed. “In this case, words are worthless, Claire. They don’t mean anything. Deeds do, but you...” “I’ll come tomorrow” I said suddenly, in a fit of courage. I saw her expression changing. She let out a breath I didn’t know she was holding. So there was a hope. “You will?” She asked. Her voice was so hopeful, so unsure. “Of course. If... If you want me to, that is” I tried. “I want you to come, Clairey”. And the smile Edna had while saying these words was the most precious thing I’ve ever seen.

*4th day of October*

So I came back today. How could I not? Edna was already sitting at her usual spot on the grass. She was smiling broadly, exposing her face to the sun. When I saw her, one thing hit me immediately. She didn’t have her hat on. Her enormous, ridiculous, yellow hat was gone. I finally saw her whole face. She had a straight nose and big eyes with long eyelashes, dark unlike her hair or brows. She had a fringe. *It suits her,* I stated, grinning. I ran towards her and plopped down at the ground. “Hi” I said. Edna smiled, turning her face at me. She had really pretty eyes. Pale blue and bright. I observed how she looked at me. Her eyes didn’t change, they stayed the same – they didn’t see anything. I felt my insides tighten. “Hello” she smiled sweetly, turning her face back in the side of the sun. “You took your hat off” I noticed. Edna nodded slowly. “Yeah. You know, I had no idea it was yellow. I was told yesterday, when you already left. Some old lady said: “You have such a nice hat, darling. I love this colour. It’s my favourite shade of yellow, it looks like sunflowers.” And I got terrified! I’ve been wearing it for months and I really hate yellow!” I laughed. And she was laughing too. She had a beautiful laugh, I noticed. And I was so, so happy because I hadn’t heard it before. It was totally worthy. “So. How was your day, Edna?” I asked. She pouted, shrugging. “Well, I’ve been here since the early morning. It’s so calm at early hours! And it smells so nice, still a bit like the night air and already a bit like the morning” she turned her head at me and then again exposed it back to the sun. She smiled when the sudden warmth caressed her cheeks. “How does it feel?” I asked her suddenly. I didn’t really plan it, it just... happened. “What?” Edna raised her almost white eyebrow and I felt proud. I know it’s childish, it’s just, I never manage to surprise her. She always knows what I mean like she has predicted every question of mine. She always has the answer ready, even if it takes her a long time to put it into right words. And it can be annoying, I swear. So I felt a bit excited just because I managed to ask a question she didn’t expect. “Being able to look straight at the sun” I précised. She let out a short laugh. “Well, you absolutely get kudos for not asking about my dreams” she laughed louder and I groaned. “I wouldn’t do that!” I exclaimed. “You would. But I told you that I hate it so now you won’t” she gently stroked my shoulder when I moved towards her, ready to oppose. “No, no, no, it’s fine. You respect my words, it shows that you care. It’s fine” she didn’t take her hand away. I smiled slightly. So she really gave me the chance, she really trusted me. That was good. That was better than good. “How does it feel?” Edna sighed happily. “Amazing. I love it, I love the warmth. You think that it can’t get any warmer, that the sun is already all over you and then, then you look at it, straight at the sun and you realize that the previous experiences meant nothing. It feels like the sun was looking at you and not vice versa. You really feel the sunbeam, as if it was touching you. Stroking, caressing. It’s... I don’t know any words to describe it, Clairey.” “Well, that has to mean it’s really something big” I chuckled and Edna joined me. “Although the dreams are kind of an interesting topic” she said suddenly. “Because it’s not like I don’t like it when people ask about them. I don’t like *the way* they do it. They are all ignorant, that’s the truth. Because dreams don’t consist only of the images. There are sounds, sometimes even smells. I manage, thank you very much” she sighed. “But still, I know something’s lacking. In my sleep. And I feel it while sleeping. So my favourite part of a dream is this short moment, just before it ends. The only part when I can’t feel the loss. There’s a short moment between deep sleep and waking up. It’s filled with dense fog, white softness caressing your skin with delicate touches. It’s quiet. And calm. It feels so safe. It’s like your brain already knows it’s going to wake up in a moment, go back to harsh and rough reality, but it doesn’t accept, kind of. You stay in unaware denial, enjoying the peace as long as you can. You want it to last forever, you want to stay in this caring, loving embrace of silence. But it never lasts long. As first comes the coldness. You feel it as a blow of wind on your skin, you’re trying to stay warm, curling up among the blankets, pressing your arms and legs together, determined to keep the warmth at all costs. But it’s taken from you. The cold slowly spreads in your body, not leaving any nerve untouched. You gasp for air, tasting the cold itself. It’s familiar. You know this feeling. Your brain slowly gets used to the reality. You rub your eyes, you can almost feel the remains of your sleep running down your now algid skin. It’s difficult. The awakening. Actually, it’s getting tougher each following time. Coming back to a place where I know I’m incomplete. And that’s why I love those whiles spent in between sleep and consciousness. There’s nothing in there. No need for eyes, the sense that I know I’m lacking. Just soft and delicate touches. Sometimes I hear whispers. But they’re rare. And they don’t bother me. So I wish I could stay in that calmness forever, covered with warmth and white light. I wish I didn’t have to wake up, feel the cold and daze again. But, of course, it has never been my choice.” I remember every single word of what she’s said. *Every single one.*  I was listening to her, dazed and wide-eyed, with my jaw dropped and she kept on talking and talking and it sounded like a melody. Unknown, but beautiful. Incomprehensible. Yet. But I’m ready to learn. “See you tomorrow, then?” I asked a few hours later. Edna raised her head, turning around so she could face me. She had that small, mysterious smile of hers. “See you, Clairey” she answered, nodding. I wanted to stand up, but she did something she had never done before. She moved her hand towards mine, searching for it and, when she finally found it, grabbed it and squeezed. It was just a brief touch. But, while squeezing back, I thought I couldn’t ask for more.

*5th day of October*

I came to the park early in the morning. When I was leaving my house I took a deep breath and smirked. Edna was right. The air still smelled with the night, but it also already smelled with the day. It was strange. And very nice. The sky was darker than it used to be the last few days, but it was already autumn so it was quite normal. And I didn’t care. Well, until I noticed that Edna… wasn’t there. My first thought was ­*Maybe it’s the wrong lawn.* It was absurd, but I got so used to seeing Edna in the park, at her very own spot under the oak tree, dressed in one of her oversized dresses, that the thought of her actually not being there seemed impossible to me. But it was true. Edna didn’t come. I slowly sat on the ground and it felt weird, it felt wrong doing it on my own. I decided to wait. Read something. I had a lot of time. But hours had passed and Edna still didn’t come. And I really had started to worry. Anything could have happened, that was true. She had told me herself that she didn’t come to the park too often because she usually didn’t feel good enough. But… But she had also told me that we’ll see each other today. I wasn’t afraid, okay. I was terrified. I had spent the whole day in the park. Edna hadn’t come. I had read a whole book and started another one, but I had been freaking out all the time so I didn’t really know what the books were about. I had observed people. They had been so different than Edna. And of course I don’t mean they weren’t blind. They just hadn’t paid attention. She always had. Well, that had been the first thing that had come to when I had seen her for the first time. She was different. She sat on the grass and really was there. And the other people hadn’t. I had missed her. So *so* much.

*6th day of October*

When I came to the park today I had closed my eyes. I had been thinking about yesterday all night, praying to be able to see her again. I would turn around and go back home if I saw from the distant that she wasn’t in the park again. And I really didn’t want to lose my hope. Or whatever I had left. The weather was better than yesterday. And it felt even worse. Because Edna wasn’t there. Who cared if the day was sunny? The only thing that really mattered was that it was a sequent day without Edna. I sat under our tree, straightening my legs. I wanted to wait. Even if I had to wait forever. “Hey, Claire, wake up!” I knew this voice. It was familiar. Nice. But it didn’t belong to Edna. I rubbed my eyes, groaning. “Did I…?” Oh my God, my neck! “Fall asleep, yes, you did, weirdo.” The voice sounded urgent. “Come on, wake up!” I sat up slowly, brushing my hair away from my eyes. I blinked, trying to recognize the face. Long, dark hair, probably even messier than my own at the moment. A serious looking, nice face with full lips, currently pursed. Oh right. Beth, that – I’m seven! And half! – kid from the park. “Hi, Beth...” I yawned, trying to clear my mind. And failing. Repeatedly. “Hi, Claire” she frowned, thinking. “Although I won’t say I’m happy seeing you. I’m not. I’m not happy. Of course not because of seeing you, just because of seeing only you, get it?” “You’re not happy Edna isn’t here” I stated. When she nodded, I sighed. “That makes two of us, honey.” “So she hadn’t come?” Beth sat on the grass beside me. Caroline was nowhere to be seen, but I didn’t waste my time on asking what was Beth doing here. I assumed I wouldn’t get my answer anyway. “Nope. She hadn’t come yesterday either.” “That’s not good. If she hadn’t showed up…” Beth scratched at her head. Adorable. “Has she told you that you’ll meet?” “Of course, she has! We were supposed to meet yesterday, probably today too, but I’ve been waiting the whole day. And nothing happened.” Beth nodded slowly. I noticed she held a lollipop in her mouth. “What are you doing here, Beth?” I tried. She sent me a “Seriously, Claire? Seriously?” glare. Again. “Well, I absolutely hadn’t run away from my home, that I know for sure. But I might’ve escaped from Caroline when we went shopping. I’ve seen you through the window, sitting here *alone.* I couldn’t stop myself.” I sighed in defeat. “You’re impossible, Beth!” I groaned. “She’s probably freaking out right now. Come on.” We stood up. Beth told where exactly she had went shopping with Caroline so I decided to go with her, just in case she got lost again. She led me out of the park and then we went to a small grocery store. It was empty. “Well, I swear I’ve left her here, I have no…” “Beth!” We both turned around saw Caroline speeding towards us. She had probably the angriest expression I’ve ever seen, on. I leaned over Beth. “I wish you luck, kid” I chuckled. Beth only managed to stuck her tongue out at me when Caroline finally caught her and pulled into a bone-crushing hug. Then, when she was done with the “checking if you’re alright” part, she started yelling. I chuckled, turning back. It was not meant for my ears, after all. I looked towards the park on my right, rather by an accident than on purpose. Then I glimpsed it. Long, almost white hair. I don’t even know when I started running, it was just like, at one moment I was standing in a street, at second – rushing at breakneck speed towards the gate as if my life depended on it. There was someone standing on our lawn. A tall, skinny woman with long, wavy hair. She couldn’t be Edna, no way. But I still felt the urge to see her, see her face, look into her eyes and try to find an explanation in them. I stopped right in front of her, panting heavily. I had to bend down, trying to catch my breath. When I finally looked up, the woman was looking right at me, waiting. “Well, um” I begun, very wisely, I admit. I made a step towards her, curious. She had Edna’s eyes. Pale blue and bright. But they were different. They saw. “I guess I’m lucky there’s only one oak tree in this park” she said. I stared at her for a moment. “Excuse me?” I cleared my throat, hoping that I didn’t sound as shocked as I was. “That’s what she’s told me. An oak tree. That I’ll find you here. Well, she’s said that’ll find Claire. Is your name Claire?” I didn’t like her voice. It was deprived of emotion, too strict. “Yes, ma’am. My name’s Claire. And who exactly has told you that I’m waiting here, may I ask?” I felt my heart speeding up. “Edna.” This one word and the world around me erupted. Breath hitched in my throat. I have been expecting such an answer and still it was a complete shock for me. “My daughter.” “So you’re Edna’s mother?” I blinked in surprise. “Why has she told you to find me? Is she alright? How does she feel?” “How does she feel?” The woman’s expression changed immediately. It was like someone took off her mask. And under this studied calmness and indifference, I saw pain, so much pain it almost hurt me physically. “Yeah?” I suddenly wasn’t so sure I wanted to know the answer. “She’s dead, Claire. She’s dead.” “No!” It came out as an impulse. Unconditioned reflex. Sign of defence. Because… it couldn’t be true. Not just because it sounded so irrational, but also… It couldn’t be true, it just couldn’t, because… if it was, then I… I felt my throat tighten, a mute scream rose in my chest, wanting to break free at all costs. A scream of fear. I was terrified. “No…” I repeated, this time much less confidently. I looked at my hands, they were shaking. I barely noticed when the woman, Edna’s mother, touched my shoulder gently. “I’m so sorry” she whispered. Her voice was soft and calm. She was a strong woman, I stated unemotionally. Strong and stern, she knew how to put herself together. I didn’t. “I know it hurts, Claire” she continued. “Just listen to me,… okay?” she didn’t wait for my reaction, though. “But… life happens, doesn’t it?” she smiled sadly. I knew she was hurt. She was trying her best to hide it, but whenever she thought I wasn’t looking, her mask fell down and I could perfectly see her real expression. I’m not sure have I ever seen so much pain before. “Could you… Could you tell me what happened?” I asked, my voice weak. She nodded. “Edna hasn’t always been blind, you know.” I didn’t. “It was a side effect, something we hadn’t been expecting at all. She was very sick, she has always been. Terminally sick. We all knew she would…” the woman gulped down a sob. “She would… die eventually. But she has been doing great, especially the last couple of days. Since she’s met you. Although, before it had been worse. She’d been having a bad time. Focusing only on her disability. Her blindness. She got it by an unfortunate accident, because of a failed surgery. She had to pay for the doctors’ mistake with her own eyes. She’s been having a really hard time with submitting to it. I thought that it was it, the end. That it broke her eventually. She couldn’t take it anymore. And one day she came back from the park smiling and she told me about you” she sighed, trying to calm down. “I’ve been so, so happy! I’ve almost lost all hope.” I looked up at her, puzzled. “But she has died, Mrs…” “Call me Judy” she interrupted me. I nodded. “Judy, then. How can you say that you’ve *almost* lost hope? Almost? Edna…” “No, my dear” Judy grabbed my hand and I started at the touch, shocked. She had a surprisingly strong grip. “It’s not like that. I know what has happened. But I wouldn’t come here if I only wanted to tell you that my daughter’s dead. Why would I? You knew her for – how long? Four days. No, I wouldn’t worry about it if Edna’s death was the only reason. Though, if it was, you wouldn’t care if I came or not. But you do. Not just because you met her. You didn’t know her so I can’t use that word. I have a different reason, much more important. I visited you to thank you”. “Thank me?!” I stared at her with my eyes wide open. “For what, on Earth?” “For helping her” Judy squeezed my hand even tighter. “For helping her to get over it, to learn how to smile genuinely in these days she had left. She knew it wasn’t much. Maybe she wasn’t expecting death, but she was sure it would come soon. And still, she didn’t regret it. When… When she was leaving, she said to me: “Find Claire, mum. Under the oak tree. You owe her a lot”. So, Claire” she cleared her throat, her hands were shaking. “Thank you. You have no idea how grateful I am” she stood up quickly and walked away as fast as she could. She was stumbling, but still kept on walking. I understood her. She wanted to leave me behind as fast as possible. It was very hard for her, she lost her daughter. She had to recover and carrying Edna’s death wishes out wasn’t really helping, I assumed. I followed Judy’s movements with my eyes. Strange, strong woman I met for the first time and still felt like I had known her for ages. I let my gaze drop and looked at the ground around me. When I glimpsed it, my heart skipped a beat. There, in the grass, fast beside me, was an envelope. A lilac one. With only one word written on it. *Claire.*  I grabbed it, my hands shaking. Judy had had to leave it here. Edna couldn’t write, of course she couldn’t so it wasn’t a letter. She might have asked someone to write instead of her, but I was quite sure she wouldn’t have done such a thing. Not her style, she would never want anyone to know her personal thoughts. So not a letter. What, then? I opened it slowly, knowing that, if I take out what was inside, there would be no turning back. I took a deep breath, squeezing my eyes shut and tipped the opened envelope over my hand. Opening my eyes, I heard my heart beating loudly. When I spotted what I held in my hand I felt tears running down my face, leaving hot and wet trails on my cheeks. I closed my eyes, desperately trying to keep the air in my lungs. It felt like drowning. An overwhelming coldness spread through my body. There, on my palm, was a dried flower. I had seen it before, of course I had. It was Edna’s flower. The one I called *just purple.*

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