John Swanberg and Matt Vredevoogd (Storyboard architect and general editing contractor)

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Two stops after Plenntyton, six transfers from the Low-Way Express, four days by camel back across the Surumbai Desert, and one extra long, extra cold passage through the Hatu glaciers. It was from this series of strenuous voyages that Takir found himself lost in a foreign land so horrendously alien that he felt as though the air itself were from another planet. Discomfort and dread seemed to be stuck between the uneven rocks and dirt that laid the ground, while gray wisps of cloud swam the sky, successfully blocking most of the sun from ever reaching its people. Naturally, the inhabitants were just as strange and uncomfortable as the rest of the place. Their talks among one another continuously startled him as their native tongue seemed to embody the key elements of a pack of monkeys and a heated domestic dispute. Even when they spoke in a language he could understand, it was always filled with new words and sounds, as if they simply decided to change how it worked. Clutter, Takir had thought, clutter is all this town is. Clutter in the streets with their vendors, clutter in the speech they speak, clutter even in the air they breathe. And he  had justly named it so, Kluttur.

And yet all the same, his parents had smiled and assured him that this new world was indeed home. Takir had furiously shook his head, for no, this land was not his home; it never could be and as such, never would. But again they smiled and sent him along his way towards his new school. While he had pleaded and begged for reprieve from just his surroundings, he soon found himself wishing only for freedom from the school. It’s blocky structure and sharp edges reminded him of a prison, and its students quite like inmates. Oh how they howled and jeered at one another! He soon came to the conclusion that a pack of monkeys would undoubtedly have been better classmates than these creatures of noise and distraction.  Among the first few days, he kept to himself, doing his schoolwork and observing their interactions. How strange they were, how alien, how wrong, but it was he who was alone, not them. Having had more friends than he could count at his old school, he felt impossibly isolated, outcast from the society of school. It was when he could take no more that he attempted to communicate, and he never would regret a decision as much as that one in his life.

It was in Mr. Bantuan’s class on a particularly hot and sticky day. A group of boys were talking about a sport or game of some sort, and Takir, having excelled at such things, thought there no better a time then now.

“...And just then I threw myself over the Hoop and hooked the Minor Ball with my Sengku all the way to the Black Zone right before he tagged me out!”

“ As if,” another boy scoffed, “ A pig like yourself could never have even reached the Sengku before the time limit- much less use it on the Minor Ball!”

The group of boys exploded into that raucous laughter, and Takir took a step back. He hadn’t anticipated this strange of a game, yet he knew just as well that a place this strange would of course have games this strange. But no, there was no comment to add; he knew nothing of this, and as he tried to slink back to his spot in the corner, his foot caught on the table of a desk, and he was instantly flung onto the ground. He groaned and rolled over onto his side, clutching his head, a loud roar reverberating in his head. After the ringing subsided, he realized that the roar was that horrible laughter from the group of boys that now surrounded him. His face lit up, and he quickly scrambled to escape their hordes, ignoring a helping hand in the crowd. Without looking back, he sat down in his seat and buried his face deep into his desk. The noise subsided ever so slightly as Mr. Bantuan tried to calm them all down, and Takir heard one boy say, “ That kid’s kind of a jerk, you were right Benci.”

Sadness and shame pressed hard against him like a thick blanket, straining against his shoulders. *Stupid, stupid, stupid*, he thought. *I hate, hate, hate them all*! He felt mad, mad at himself for trying and yet even more mad at them for being so cruel, so unreasonable. He lay so deep in dark thoughts that it wasn’t until a hand patted his back that he realized school was over. He peered up through tear-caked eyes, and saw roughly the outline of his teacher, complete with his pointy cat-like ears and frazzled curly brown hair that only complimented his tall and lanky body. Takir liked Mr. Bantuan, but he was in no mood for talking, least of all with a Klutterton.

“ I know Takir, it can be difficult to change, especially coming from as far away as you did but really yo-” Mr. Bantuan begin.

“ Look, I get you think you’re trying to help, but just stop before you make a fool of yourself. You don’t get it, ok? To you, this place may be home but to me, it’s a living hell. I don’t need your preachings, so why don’t you and the rest of the people here just leave me where I belong, alone!” And with that Takir shot from his desk and flew out of the classroom and into the humid air.

He kept running and running, dirty buildings and sewers flying by him, until there were small houses and shops, and further still he went until only strange foreign trees surrounded him. It was here, in a small clearing far away from anybody else, that he promptly began to cry. He knew he had been mean to Mr. Bantuan, but the whole world here seemed to be mean to him. He cried for his mistakes and the hostility of the land. Everything here was a challenge, and he hated it. His heart yearned and strained to leave that it nearly pushed its way out of his heart. Home kept pulling and tugging at him, trying desperately to make him return, yet he knew he could not, for this horrid place was his ‘home.’ Despair gripped his mind at the thought of many more days just like this, for the rest of his life.

And so he laid curled upon the ground for a time, until he heard the rustling of a bush beneath a nearby tree. Quickly, he unfurled his body, and stood, wiping a sleeve against the runny eyes and nose.

“H-hello?” He asked in a shaking, quivering voice.

He waited for a few moments but there was no response. After a few long moments, he was sure nobody could be there. Yet just as he sat back down, the nearby bush rustled again and this time he managed to see something, just for a brief moment.

Takir cautiously approached the bush, taking care, just in case it was something sinister. However, as he approached the somewhat discerning bush, it fell still, and refused to sway against the slight breeze that permeated the air. Suddenly, the leaves tore apart, yielding to him a dark blackness that filled the whites of his eyes much like coffee poured into a mug. His body was all but stuck, paralyzed with a strange sense of curiosity and fear. Yet as if upon their own accord, as if drawn to the darkness, his legs carried him closer and closer into the abyss until it engulfed him entirely.

Immediately, he was snapped out of his trance and thrust into a darkness that seemed to pull and push from every which way, his sense of direction all but lost in the tumult. He tried to scream out in fear, but his voice seemed to rebound against the sides of the darkness, bending and twisting it in different shades and shapes of black. He had no sense of time, no inclination of when or where he was existing. A sudden pressure began to build among his body, slowly and almost unnoticeable at first, yet quickly picking up to an almost unbearable rate. Just as he felt as though his very being would rip apart into a million different pieces, he heard a loud pop and his mind slipped away to a slumber.

Takir awoke, disoriented and blind. His thoughts swirled through his head incoherently. Try as he might, Takir could not focus, and it wasn’t until several moments later that the world around him seemed to take shape.

Suddenly, as if donning a pair of precise eyeglasses, the world appeared in startling clarity. However, it didn’t seem to hold anything, just a vast expanse of nothing, solid shades of brown and tan as far as the eye could see. Takir looked up into the sky, hoping to see something that might constitute some rationality.

There was nothing but a kaleidoscope of blue. It fractured his vision, and the constant flatness warped his conscience. There seemed to be no end, no possible way to escape, no single reality to grasp, no *normal*. This sudden sharp realization broke Takir’s curiosity of the new world. There was no concrete reality; everything was relative, and with it, nothing was relative, because there was not anything--simply a vast dreamscape that melded into the wishes of everyone within, forming an independent realities for each, in which everyone coexisted.

While Takir’s weary mind battled for understanding of this new environment, his eyes spotted the blurry edges of a creature in the distance, slowly sliding silently towards him. As it came closer and closer into view, he found it resembling someone curiously familiar, yet different in just as many ways. Soon enough, the creature was within proper observable view, and Takir almost took a step back at the sheer absurdity of the situation. Indeed he had been right, for the creature closely resembled Mr. Bantuan, with his cat-like ears and frazzled curly brown hair. Yet its dissimilarities were just as abundant. It had a peculiar twisted body, much like a gnarled old tree, yet where bark should be stood flesh and bone. Its legs thick and strong, reminded Takir of a kangaroo, but of course kangaroos didn’t have eyes locked so far back in their sockets that they almost reached the back of the head. And yet despite the strangeness of its body, what surprised Takir the most was its chest, if it could even be called that. Branches of skin weaved together intricately as though to protect something, and peering closer he noticed that it closely resembled a glass jar, much like one his mother used to put jam in, yet a swirl of colors slowly drifted within its embrace.

He would have been afraid, but then he remembered Klutter. Strange people for strange lands, *it’s only the natural way*, he thought. But strange indeed was this land and these people, far stranger than Klutter had ever been, far stranger than his imagination might ever have let him conceive.

“Mr. Bantuan? Mr. Bantuan, I’m sorry. I was just angry and flustered, and I wasn’t thinking straight at the time, I just was confused and, to be quite honest, mad at everybody around me. Don’t take it personally alright?” Takir said apologetically.

The Bantuan creature nodded three times slowly, as if agreeing, and then opened his mouth, wider than Takir had thought humanly possible, and, as though pulling with his lungs from the colored jar in his chest, expelled a sea foam blue color into the air, literally painting the world with his words. The moment the color reached his skin, a powerful sense of calming filled his body, and he could feel the peaceful nature of The Creature. Although no words were put forth, Takir felt as though it had said far more with that strange gesture than any amount of words ever could.

“Wh...what are you?” Takir whispered as he stumbled for words, “Is it that still you Mr. Bantuan?”

Many questions circled his mind, all bumping and whirling into each other, the gears in his mind long since broken. *Did these creatures hear? Was it still even his teacher?* So instead of saying, Takir simply smiled back at the funny Creature of Color, decidingly renaming him Blue. It seemed to fit him quite well, and it was then that Blue smiled back and beckoned for Takir to follow. Without inhibition, he followed, trusting wholly this new friend he had made in a strange world.

As time stretched on, there seemed to be no end to the repetitive travels of Takir and Blue. The same desert seemed to pass, and yet reappear just the same as they traversed the sand. Takir did not know where Blue was taking him, there was very little to understand, the colors did not make sense to him, and they only stirred an emotional understanding.

What seemed like hours later, Blue abruptly stopped in his tracks, a gentle orange cascaded from where his mouth might be, expanding, and fading away into the air. The aura caressed Takir like a soft blanket, and without any cause, he seemed to bubble with excitement.

All the while, and without any notice from Takir, and in a seamless transition that can only occur in dreams, the world around him changed. No longer was the vast expanse of the desert devouring his conscience, but a new environment arose. Takir recognized it at once, and gasped. There was no mistaking the prison-like facade of the school he so hated. As he entered the building, logically the only option, the interior morphed. No, it had never been an interior, only once Takir entered did it take shape.

Inside he saw immediately what must have been the game the boys at school spoke of, the Galas Babola. It seemingly resembled a giant honeycomb, with suspended nets marking the barriers between time limits. As he entered the prelim court, he realized that he had literally no idea how to play. Not one single neuron in his brain, no single connection, the vast network failed to supply him with a logical clue, there was simply nowhere to start his thought process. The game which had been discussed by Benci and the boys was far more complicated than he remembered, and nothing he had learned seemed to apply here. Takir glanced around in bewilderment. The court was no longer just a court, and the vast track was now housed in a stadium, millions of spectators yelled, cheered, and jeered, yet there was no sound. A constant stream of gaseous colors erupted incessantly from every single being’s mouth, their jaws rippling with words.

As the cascade flowed over Takir, he heard nothing, but he experienced an immense variety of emotions… far too many to comprehend. However, he could not help but feel reassured, something he attributed to the non-stop jade pouring forth from the closest areas of the stands. It bolstered his confidence above and beyond his usual. He turned to see Blue beckoning for him to enter the court, and despite his ignorance of the game, he leapt in.

With a yell, a yell that no one else could hear, he charged onto the prelim court. Grabbing a large stick, and a plethora of small tokens, he raced across the track, jumping over the cracks of the honeycomb with ease. Before long, he noticed other contestants appearing almost out of thin air around him, wielding similar equipment, yet actually running forward with intent and knowledge, as if they knew what it was that they were supposed to do. He frantically scanned the increasing group of players, searching for a pattern of perhaps teams or an objective that needed to be achieved. But his efforts were met with nothing, no inclination of how the game was played. Players were ducking and weaving, occasionally hitting each other, balls of all shapes and sizes flying across the court, some people jumping on the nets propelling themselves to reach hoops floating high in the sky, the only consistent thing in all of it being their wide smiles.

With all of the confusion, all the madness, it suddenly just clicked. He jumped into the mess, picking up something that looked like an interesting mix of a basketball and a birdie, and promptly began to throw it into as many hoops as he could, challenging all people who got in his way and dodging the others who looked to fight. The crowd’s energy seemed to intensify and the colors grew louder and louder as he moved faster and faster, his body a machine to the game.

“I get it!” He yelled triumphantly to himself, “All I’ve got to do to win is to enjoy myself, to have genuine fun!”

Takir laughed, a loud laugh only he could hear, yet a more heartfelt than he had ever produced in all his life. Truly the game hadn’t been so bad, he realized; it had simply been his negatively directed preconceived notion about it that had previously stopped him from understanding the simplicity and, equally so, the beauty of it.

Just as he was finally regaining his breath from an epic laughing fit, Blue appeared by his side, releasing a green gas that instantly warned him of some impending danger. Together, they scrambled out of the school just as it started to crumble and melt away to nothingness, leaving them in an empty black void. But as Takir’s eyes adjusted to the new darkness, he came to see that the new landscape that surrounded them was simply much darker than their previous two. It looked as though they were ants on the bottom of a giant rainforest, the deep green from the trees almost emanating with earthly presence. Globlets of rain the size of his head kept slipping off taller leaves and sliding into his hair, continuously soaking him while Blue appeared dry.

“Where are we?” Takir asked out loud, although of course talking only to himself.

Blue shook his head, pulling a finger to his lips and pointed with his other hand forward, past a grove of oversized grass and bushes. Positioning himself just right, Takir could manage to catch a clear shot through to a small path a little ahead of themselves. Blue let out a darker shade of purple, signifying that he should just stay where he was and wait.

Just when his patience was at its end, he saw a boy around his age begin walking down. As he came closer he could see that the boy was someone he knew, someone who had an important impact on his life...Benci! He suddenly realized with a startle. How strange that he also would be here, Takir thought. But of course, strange things happen in strange places. He recalled that it was Benci who had initially called him out upon being a loser, yet he had hardly spoken a word to him. Although they barely knew each other, Takir knew he hated him. He continued to watch though, instead of walking out and greeting him, and saw a most horrendous thing occur, one that he would’ve imagined to have been enjoyable to watch for his most hated adversary.

Benci appeared to simply be walking down the path, doing what seemed to be random everyday duties, paying no mind to the pure spontaneous nature of his actions. To his left, he delivered the mail into a mailbox, immediately followed by taking a bag of groceries out of a car and into a house, then again scraping snow off the ground. He just seemed locked in an endless cycle of chore like jobs, which would’ve been bad enough, but the part that terrified Takir the most were the various creatures that floated around and behind him. They ranged in size from the tiniest pixie to a grand lion of sorts, but they all kept the same strange hunched back and wrinkled red or green skin, almost like elder demons. Takir again shivered, for Benci hadn’t the slightest inclination of their presence, yet they pushed and pulled on him, like one would a puppet with its strings, and soon Takir noticed him growing weary from it, even if he could not see them. He began to fail at his simple duties, dropping milk from the grocery store back home, vacuuming up socks and pennies, cracking windows and they were tried to clean.

Takir tugged on Blue’s arm and pointed forward frantically, but Blue simply shook his head calmly and issued a deep violet that passed through his head, seeming to reverberate the word, ‘wait.’ Takir shook his head, he knew this wasn’t right, even if he couldn’t understand the situation in its entirety he at least could comprehend the cruelty of leaving Benci to battle demons that he wasn’t even able to see.

Takir shot out from under the bush, quickly twisting his arm out of the hand that came from Blue who desperately attempted to stop him. But Takir was already across the gap and in a few moments he reached Benci.

“Benci! You’ve got to stop this! At this rate you’ll fall over and die, you can’t keep it up. Look behind you! Those...things. Those demons! They’re the cause of your problems, come, I can help you and together we can take them.” Takir said rambling on.

But Benci paid him no mind, as if he weren’t there at all. He continued to walk down the path, failing duty after duty, and growing wearier and wearier. Soon, Takir thought, he’s just going to topple over and die. The uncomfortable proximity to the demons suddenly revealed something he hadn’t noticed previously, there was something written on the back of each one of them in what looked like black paint. He looked closer and saw words like ‘HOMEWORK’ or ‘SPORTS’ on the back of smaller ones, yet on the bigger creatures were engraved even more fearsome things such as ‘ABUSIVE FATHER’ and ‘POVERTY’.

He tried to punch them, to kick and kill them, but his fists went straight through their ethereal bodies, all attempts in vain. He tried instead to stop Benci, but again, his limbs went straight through. Takir let out a cry of frustration. He looked back to Blue for something, anything to help Benci from these demons, but Blue, clad with a sad look upon his face, slowly was nodding no. This isn’t right! Takir thought, why would Blue show me this, why would I be here if I am naught but an observer?

“Please! Don’t you understand? I just want to help him!” Takir yelled, a plea to the universe.

At this, Blue smiled and delivered a long, formal bow, then waved to him.

“Wha..?” Takir began, questioning if Blue had heard him speak at all, but the physical ground beneath him gave way and without warning he was back into the whirlwind of darkness that had brought him to this place. Again, his body flipped and turned and pushed and pulled until after an undeterminable quantity of time and a horridly strenuous pop, he fell up and out of the bush of the hole to whence he had fallen.

He gazed around at his surroundings, seeing everything differently despite nothing having been changed. Sunlight pushed past the thick brambles and leaves of the trees above him, the golden rays like gentle hands from the heaven, and directly ahead of him, he could see a blue sky, a sky so blue that he imagined it must’ve been spoken by Blue. The clouds seemed extra puffy and lazy as they floated in the sky; the birds of summer chirping in tunes he had never heard. He realized now, that this world, much like the one he had just come from, had a beauty of its own, a beauty that couldn’t just be seen or described, but rather a beauty that had to be felt, experienced.

Takir rose slowly from his spot in the dirt and stretched. *Today is Saturday*, he thought with a smile. *The people weren’t so bad, never mind their foreign language*, for if he had understood Blue then he could understand them. The school, and its students, were equally just as simple: they sought only to have fun; that was the only rule they allowed to dictate their life. And Benci...he was misunderstood; his actions had to be taken with the knowledge that he went through a lot, and perhaps that could not justify cruelty, but it certain could explain it.

And so, it was as he began to walk down the path back to his home that he could perceive a more profound truth. Life was better through the eyes of an optimist, because at the very least, everybody deserves to be happy, and if such a state of being is unattainable, then perhaps one could be hopeful for a day when it would arrive.