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City of Blues

“I found it!” gasped the boy.

It was a true wonder that her scrawny friend was moving so fast. Of course, it must be the news.

“Really?” asked Liberty.

The boy’s eyes scanned around the empty soccer field as if to check for predators waiting to snatch his prized possession. Then he plopped down on the blue grass and shoved the folded flyer into Liberty’s hands.

Liberty, realizing the urgency, peered down at the rainbow text: “Greetings Blues, we are the Capital. We will be sending traders to your city at 8 tonight. Open your western gates.”

“So it is true,” Liberty bit her lower lip, “Where did you find this Charlie?”

“My Dad’s office. He’s at the meeting with the High Committee right now.”

Liberty jumped up and glanced down at Charlie, his skin almost blending into the light-blue

grass. She stuck one hand out in which Charlie grasped it with a sigh. In one quick motion, she pulled the slender boy up with ease.

Liberty was born a free spirit. She was no animal; she refused to be leashed by society. From youth, she refused to believe in a world of blue. Is everything really meant to be so identical to each other? A community where the word diversity didn't exist? It sickened her to her stomach that everything was so bland, so blue.

Charlie tapped her right shoulder.

"7:55," he announced with evident excitement in his voice.

Liberty lay on the low roof of one of the broken-down homes near the western gates. The roof belonged to Liberty's grandparents, who were poor and forced to live in the outer ranges of the City of Blues. The gate itself was a giant blue arch. Stretching down its sides stood tall blue walls that were a barrier from what Liberty's teachers called dangerous Outsiders, who were known to be a society of low-intelligent animals.

Of course, while most blue-skinned children listened in terror and shock, Liberty could only imagine the day she would meet the Outsiders. From what she discovered from Charlie, the Outsiders resided in a place called the Unified City.

All of a sudden, her imagination had turned into a reality. The suspected Outsiders appeared as a dot behind the blue vertical bars twenty feet in front of her. This tiny dot had her buzzed with curiosity.

Though unable to clearly see in the pitch-black night, Liberty knew with certainty that Charlie must've been as thrilled as she was. With a groan, the vertical bars made a crackling sound and began to rise with a mechanical humming accompanying it.

Suddenly, the gradual sounds of a slow march near Liberty made her peer down the side of the roof. In the dark, she could still make out the glimmering blue armor of the blue-skinned soldiers.

“What are soldiers doing here, greeting traders?” Liberty turned back and asked

Charlie. Out of the dark, a quivering voice answered back, “They’re going to kill them.”

“Kill them? They’re going to kill the Outsiders?” Liberty asked in a panic.

“You don’t understand, Liberty,” Charlie whispered from the dark, “They don’t want citizens seeing them. Or even to know that they exist....”

At this point, Liberty spotted the electric carriage, or what the Blues call the Ele, arriving near the gate. It was nothing like she had ever seen before.

“Red, Liberty, it’s red. The color red is so close to us,” said Charlie.

“What is... red?”

“It’s the color of the Ele. I learned the colors from my Dad during a High Committee meeting.”

Before Liberty could interject, the blue soldiers halted at the Ele in front of the gate. At this moment, a pair of people stepped out of the Ele. Their skin matched the color of the dark. Even the bright blue lights from the top of the gate, now turned on and pointed at the traders, could barely decipher the dark pair.

“Greeting Blues, we are from the Capital sent here to make a trade,” announced one of the Outsiders. Liberty could not tell if the Outsider’s mouth moved, for even his teeth were pitch black.

Two blue soldiers stepped forwards, and suddenly, two rings echoed out, followed by two rhythmic thumps. A scream echoed in a nearby house. A middle-aged mother stood on the front steps of her front porch. She was poor too, banished to live in the outer banks away from the

heart of the city. Before the mother could take a step in an attempt to run, the soldiers seized her. Expecting another ring, Liberty squinted her eyes shut and covered her ears with the palms of her hands. However, she heard a camera click instead. She opened her eyes in time to see one of the soldiers releasing the poor mother and stuffing a blue rectangle in his armor.

“It’s a Reset!” Charlie hushed after scooting up to Liberty’s right arm.

“Reset?”

“It resets a person’s memory when used. They forget everything from the past 5 minutes. My Dad has talked about it once, but... I didn’t think it was real.”

Taken care of the witness, the soldiers torched the fallen pair and the red Ele and proceeded back towards the city’s center. Without thinking, Liberty climbed down and ran through the arch just as the gate began to inch towards the ground.

“Liberty!”

She frantically searched for something, a memory of the Outsiders that she could collect. Instead, her hand located a small bag near the burning Ele. Behind her, the gate had almost successfully hit the ground. Liberty snatched up the bag and slid back through the crack of the gate where Charlie was fuming.

“Liberty! What are you thinking?”

Unfazed, Liberty held up the Outsider bag triumphantly, “Look!”

Charlie peered at the bag in curiosity.

The High Committee was made up of 5 men, acting as the rulers of the City of Blues. As the son of a High Committee member, Charlie knew all about the truth behind the Outsiders, information that no ordinary blue citizen had even heard whispers of. According to his father, many different colors of men lived in the Unified City. Long ago, the High Committee decided that other colors were inferior, that blues shall rule supreme. According to them, the skies and oceans gave them superior knowledge and skill. And this is what Charlie told Liberty when they were 15. Now, at his 5-story mansion, Charlie couldn't believe how captivating the Outsiders' bag stood out in the all-blue room.

“Open it,” Charlie tapped Liberty, “Liberty, open it.”

“Hold on. Why were the Outsiders killed? They didn't do anything wrong!”

“Haven't you heard the teachers? Outsiders are dangerous! Dangerous, dumb creatures planning to predate on our citizens. Why wouldn't the High Committee want to eliminate them?”

“They told us that they were animals. Did those two men look like animals to you? They’re just like us!”

“They’re not blue Liberty!”

“And?”

“They’re inferior. Creatures that are waiting to predate on our citizens.”

“And how do you know that?”

“Dad said so.”

“And why is your Dad right?”

Charlie took a second.

“Exactly. You don’t know. The Outsiders could be exactly like us. Eating blueberries every

day!” “Just open the bag Liberty, they’re dead. My Dad’s coming home any minute.”

Intending to finish her argument but the curiosity of the bag even stronger, Liberty glared at

Charlie and pried the bag open. Inside, squares with an intriguing scent invited Liberty's hand to reach in and take one out.

“What is it?”

“I dunno,” Charlie shrugged, “Smells good though. Maybe it's food?”

“Taste it?”

“You do it.”

Liberty, the daring one of the two, plopped one in her mouth. It melted and transformed into a thick goo. The sweet, yet bitter taste carried Liberty's hand in for another. Charlie, noticing her pleased face, followed suit. And soon, Liberty laid the empty bag flat against the table.

“What is that?”

Charlie groaned, satisfied, “Definitely not blueberries.”

Liberty had a particular sparkle in her eye and smiled.

Charlie noticed her mischievous grin instantly. “What?”

“Let’s get more.”

“Get more of what?”

“Let’s get more of this! Let’s go to the Unified City, the city where those two men came from!” Liberty said as she gestured towards the empty bag lying on the table.

“That’s where those animals live, Liberty! Those people without a hint of blue on them.”

“So? That doesn’t mean they’re animals. Seemed fine to me. Besides, who knows what else they have there!”

“Liberty. They’re unpredictable and dangerous! They have nothing good there...except for maybe those things in that bag.”

“Listen. My stomach is sick of just blueberries. Look...you have to see their city at least once.”

“My Dad will kill us! Think about what the High Committee will do, or do you not remember the Resets?”

“Not going to happen if they don’t catch us! Look, I’m going. Are you in or not?”

Liberty's crossed arms and glare made it known that it wasn't a question. Charlie knew that he would be a ghost to Liberty if he didn't go.

His eyes elevated to something right above Liberty's head. Noticing that Charlie's eyes were no longer focused on her, she asked him again.

"It's about nine right now. I tell my Dad I'm sleeping over at your house for the night, and we come back by tomorrow night. But that's it. One day," said Charlie.

Liberty, the implied winner of the argument, smirked, "Of course, one day."

Glancing left then right, Liberty climbed into the passenger seat of Charlie's blue Ele. Inside, the blue leather seats provided warmth in the cold night. Charlie grabbed onto the support railing and flung himself into the driving seat. Fumbling with the keys, Charlie's gleaming sweat on his forehead was noticeable to Liberty even in the dark.

"Listen, no one is going to know. One day. No harm, no foul."

"I know. Just stop talking."

Taking the cue, Liberty zipped her mouth shut. At this, the Ele's two bright blue eyes blinked into the road in front of them. Charlie pressed a tiny button on the blue wheel, and two blue curtains, acting as doors, began their slow descend to hide the Ele's passengers. And once the curtains stopped rolling, the blue Ele commenced its uncertain journey.

Liberty's Dad was also a part of the High Committee. However, an unfortunate death brought Liberty to live with only her mother since she was 12. He always talked with an unplaced enthusiasm in his voice during the days preceding his death. He waved his arms around widely as he spoke of potential trades with people of different colors. Finally, eating foods that were not blue. Finally, talking to people that looked different. Finally, bring everyone back together. And it was these talks of 'finallys' that unnerved the High Committee as Liberty's Dad pushed them to tell the citizens the truth. And it was these talks of 'finallys' that finally put an end to Liberty's family.

Next to the blue arch, Charlie tapped his Dad's identification badge on the small flickering sensor. The bars grumbled and began to rise.

“Wait, you know how to get there?”

“If we keep straight, we’ll get there. Our western fence faces the exact position of The Unified City.”

“Really?”

“That’s what my Dad said. Long ago, we supposedly lived in The Unified City as well. But some of the Blues thought that they were too far superior. And thus, came the City of Blues and accompanied by seclusion.”

“And they think not to tell us that? It would be so diff...Charlie look! Look at the sand!”

Charlie lifted the curtain on his side, “Yellow. I can’t believe it. The sand is yellow!”

As if the sand disagreed with his words, the sand changed to the color of white. Then black. Then green. And soon, along with the color-changing sand, the large city was noticeable in their sight - four times the size of the City of Blues. There were no walls, nothing protecting the city. The passengers of the incoming blue Ele could see the entire city glow with colors in the night. The brown skyscrapers. The orange houses. The red Eles. And objects they had never seen before. The most noticeable, however, was that nothing was blue. As they drew closer, they remarked that the people reflected the city’s colors – people of all colors except blue.

As the Ele pulled into the city, gasps echoed. Evidently, this generation had never seen the color blue before.

“Outsiders, Liberty. We’re here. What do we do with these animals? You think they’ll eat us?”

“Don’t be silly, Charlie; they’re just like us. Come on.”

Before Charlie could protest, Liberty had lifted her side of the curtain and stepped down from their vehicle.

Following suit, Charlie rolled up his curtains and stepped down. Already, he could hear the large clamoring on the other side of the Ele. Liberty was making fast friends. Charlie stared at the Outsiders in front of him, and the Outsiders’ eyes fixated on him like Charlie was a specimen to be studied. He didn’t know how to begin.

“Um... me,” Charlie said as he gestured toward himself, “A blue. BUH-LOO.”

The Outsiders seemed even more confused now, slightly irritated by his patronizing attitude. “We know who you are.”

“Oh. You speak,” Charlie swallowed, “Well, nice to meet you. I’m Charlie, from the City of Blues.”

“Greetings Charlie, I am Charlotte, from The United City,” one of the women in the front answered.

Surprised yet in awe, Charlie stuck his hand out. Charlotte took the cue and reciprocated his action. So far, these different people of color appeared to be just as intelligent as they were.

On the other side, Liberty couldn't believe the Outsiders' inventions. They used little hand-sized rainbow rectangles to communicate with one another. Indeed, for a city that was expected to be filled with dangerous creatures, it was even better than the City of Blues!

A series of sirens reignited another commotion. Coming in a multitude of different colored Eles, a group of people in rainbow armor swarmed around Liberty. Before she could protest, the soldiers handled her into one of the Eles. And a second after, a body was plopped next to her.

“Liberty? What's happening?”

“I think they're taking us,” she whispered.

In disbelief, Charlie could only reply sarcastically, “Oh really? They're taking us?”

Before Liberty could answer, the Eles jolted forwards toward the center of the colorful city.

Lights stretched across the top level of the skyscraper. Each light was a different color, giving the room a rainbow glow. The pair of Blues were seated on one side of the long table, with a group of eight on the other. Together, all the colors of the people were present. On the table were various foods: the brown squares that the traders carried, some sort of red food half the size of a hand, and orange spheres with little green stems on top. Surrounding them were transparent windows, except for the one wall with the elevator. The windows gave the Blues a view of the entire city.

“Welcome Blues, to The Unified City,” the green man announced. His eyes were darting across the Blues’ bodies, observing their blue hair, their blue eyes, their light blue teeth.

The green man’s darting eyes made the Blues tense. “Um. We’re from the City of Blues.”

The green man’s finger drummed against the table, adding to the tension, “Yes, the place we just sent two traders to. Where are they, by the way?”

Liberty quickly spoke up, “Traders? No, we don’t know about that. We just wanted to explore! We weren’t even sure if you existed until now!”

The finger drumming stopped. “What?”

The end to the finger drumming made Liberty even tenser, “Well, at the City of Blues, no one knows about your city. They, um, hide your existence.”

“Really?”

Charlie took the turn now, “Because we thought you were low-intelligence animals. You aren’t even blue!”

“Is that what you think?” the green man questioned, looking around his companions, “Do we look like ‘low-intelligence animals’ to you?”

“Your ancestors believed that different colors could not work together, that the Unified City would collapse in the end. And your ancestors, thinking that the Blues are far too intelligent to fall with the Unified City, left and built their own city. But look around, does it seem like we have fallen? No, we have only grown. The colors in this room symbolize our unity. Look at the food in front of you. Chocolate,” he said as he pointed towards the brown squares.

At this, Liberty muttered to herself, “Cho-co-late.”

“Yes, chocolate. Apples and those are oranges,” the green man continued as he pointed towards the fruits. “The United City has far more than what your city has even imagined. Do you have this much variety of foods?”

And judging by the expressions from the Blues' faces, he nodded, "That's what I thought. Each color brings its own goods. Together, the people of our city have access to all that's available. And now, through our partnerships with each other, we are superior to your city." Concluding his speech, the green man looked satisfied. On the other side, Liberty appeared even more curious than before, while Charlie sat grumpily next to her, struggling to come up with an answer.

Back in the City of Blues, Charlie's Dad opened the front door to his house. "Charlie?" he called out.

Prompted with no response, Charlie's Dad looked around and found a small notecard: "Sleeping over at Liberty's tonight, be back tomorrow!" Considered a typical day of the week, Charlie's Dad turned to throw the notecard away. Before he let it escape through his fingers, he noticed a black bag with a foreign aroma escaping from its zipper at the bottom of the trash can.