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English-IV

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Crusty Feet

High up into the hills the only view was of dilapidated housing sansvegetation. Every inch ofthe streets was filled with untidy tents, shredded tarps, and decaying high rises. Satellite dishes hung from the sides of concrete housing reaching to the sky like withering trees during an eternal Siberian winter. Run-down and ragged from every corner to the decaying infrastructure of the neighborhood, a shirtless brown boy emerged from the glaring shadows.

An archaic ball rolled by his crusty, well seasoned feet. The ball did not just roll over the decrepit pavement; rather it hopped on a roller coaster ride. Every piece of old, unwanted trash lied waiting to touch the ball. The ball’s synthetic material had chipped away like the aged paint on the walls, and the creases of the ball were full of dirt to cover the empty spaces.

Passing by a run-down home two stories up the boy heard a woman screaming in despair--the voice rang out with acceptance and pleasure. The scream punctured deep in the eardrum and resonated a sharp pain throughout the boy’s body. The boy’s limbs did not flinch nor change rhythm, and with each short step he carefully guided the ball in front of him.

The dirt on his head blended in with his natural skin tone, a caramel color that gave life to his thin bones. As if someone had just sanded the boy’s face, the skin was smooth as the sweat slowly dripped down his forehead. His plump pink lips became crispier and drier with every single step he took; however, they were soon wet as the salt of the sweet seeped on to his tongue.

Dirt-infested water ran alongside the pavement, and the boy could smell the fresh iron of blood in the stream. His nose well groomed to the malodorous stench of his community, the boy was unmoved by others. Growing more familiar with his surroundings as he glided by, he could feel his legs moving quicker and his heart working harder.

As the boy twisted and turned around the corner his crisp lips tightened, his gossamer eyes lit up, and his bones of his face began to puncture his tender chestnut skin. His legs moved to the tune of the tango, and his tongue was quick to hang to the side of his mouth. It was all so simple. Just him, the ball, and the court.

Four walls decorated in ancient teal paint encompassed the pavement. Houses lining up as high as the bright blue sky itself had torn up clothes hanging over balconies. Windows cracked open overlooked the fenced in area. No sounds could be made out, just the crackling of every step.

He gazed upon the pavement. Like breathing the purest of air in the Sierra Nevadas, the boy inhaled the sweaty hot air on the court. Almost naturally the sandals slid off and the boys feet sank into the ground becoming one with field, and his toes dug into the cracks of the ground as they were the pivot of all movement.

A gust of wind overcame the field, leaving a real salty taste in the boy’s mouth. He looked around. Nothing moved as he slowly did a 360 degree turn back to his starting point. Reaching for the ball, the boy popped it up into the air gliding from one foot to the other. The ball fell. The boy talked to himself in portuguese and popped it back up, yet the ball decided to work with gravity and bounced on the pavement. The boy stomped his feet on the ground, ran his hands through his hair, and yelled at himself to only return to the ball.

Soon after closing his eyes and taking a deep breath, the boy decided to start kicking the ball against one of the walls. As he moved toward the wall the fallen leaves from trees crumpled under his feet. The boy kicked the ball at the wall to the tune of a song: there was the initial *pop* when the boy kicked the ball, then it proceeded to crumple more leaves, then it hit the wall with a *thump* that resonated up the high rises, and lastly the ball rolled over the leaves back to the boy’s feet. The boy changed the tune as he grew more impatient among the time, and kept maneuvering his eyes from side to side as if he was waiting for someone to join him. But he just kept doing his thing. *Pop,* crumpling of leaves, *thump,* and more crumpling.

A woman eyeing the field from her makeshift balcony--full of straws and sticks--could see the boy’s ribs protruding his skin as he played with the ball. His curly, oily hair flopped from side to side as he touched the ball. She noticed how delicate his touch was; such beauty and precision as he barely let the ball touch his foot. The inside arch of the foot was the cushion for the ball in order to move it to its next destination. She caught herself staring at the boy with his curly hair flopping from side to side. While staring in admiration, the woman’s leathered hands dropped a shirt onto the sticks. She proceeded to gather herself and her old stained gown.

Her lips quivered as she sighed and placed the damp shirt on top of the clothing line. Hearing a noise from above, the boy squinted as he looked up. As they met eyes, the boy yelled in his native tongue. She shook her head. Using every vocal cord in his throat, the boy called out to her again. Shimmering in his eyes was the nodding response of the woman from the balcony.