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hello_world: a new, not-quite-animated story (first draft)

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hello_world (draft 1)
Jack Harbick

NOTE: a reading of this version of the script can be found here:
<https://youtu.be/zULShsJmuh8>

CHARACTERS

QUINN: A robot with two short legs and three extendable arms. They are thoughtful and observant.

BENN-E: (Pronounced like Benny) A robot with two relatively stiff arms and a spherical base. They are kind and full of wonder.

PLANT CREATURE: A remarkable abomination.

ROBOT: ???

hello_world (draft 1)

Jack Harbick

EXT. GREENHOUSE

It is a dark and stormy night. Lightning flashes, briefly illuminating a sky full of clouds. We see a distant shot showing the greenhouse next to an industrial-looking building. Rain drums down upon a glass roof--the top of a greenhouse. A droplet of rain falls into a small opening where the glass of the roof has been shattered. The water droplet falls a long way before landing on a small bud in a pot on the floor.

EXT. FACTORY

We see a slightly closer view of the factory. It is dark and quiet as the rain continues to pour until a large lightning bolt strikes the lightning rod atop the building. The storm seems to lessen, but the rain persists. It is calm for a moment.

INT. FACTORY

We see a dark room inside the building. There is a fizzle of electricity as a low battery warning begins to flash. There is a pause before two glowing eyes open. The eyes blink. There is a mechanical whirring sound as QUINN reaches an arm out and pulls a lever. A strip of emergency lights begins to glow, lighting up the small work room. We can finally see QUINN mostly illuminated. They have three extendable arms and two relatively short legs. QUINN looks down and sees the low battery indicator on their torso and begins digging through junk. Not finding what they're looking for, they leave the room. QUINN closes the door behind them and begins traveling down the hallway, still searching. The dim glow of the emergency lights continues in strips down the hallway, countered by the faint pulsing of the low-battery warning. As they walk, they notice that there is a distinct lack of human presence. After a bit of searching, they call out.

QUINN

Hello?

There is no response.

QUINN

It seems as though the power has gone out. I require charging or else I am afraid I won't be of much use...

There is still no response.

QUINN

Hello?

Eventually, they begin to hear a faint humming sound. Unlike most of the sounds here, this humming is musical in nature. After a moment of hesitation, QUINN begins heading towards the sound. At last, they reach an exterior door with a barely-lit exit sign hanging above it. QUINN opens the door, and natural light comes flooding in. It's still raining. We can see the greenhouse with an open doorway a few hundred feet away or so. The humming seems to be coming from there. QUINN reaches a mechanical hand-equivalent out cautiously, and drops of water land on them. They quickly pull their hand back. They look around quickly and spot a coat rack on the wall, on which hangs a scarf. QUINN grabs the scarf and uses it to wipe the water from their hand. They return the scarf to its place. Unsure of what to do, they call out the door.

QUINN

Hello?

There is no response.

QUINN

Whoever is making that sound, I require charging.

They stand in the doorway for a moment before once again grabbing the scarf. They wrap the scarf around their neck and brace themselves at the exit. At last, they plant all three of their hands on the ground and use them to rush towards the greenhouse. As they rush, the blinking of their low-battery warning seems to speed up.

QUINN

I REQUIRE CHARGING.

Finally, they make it in the doorway and set themselves down on the ground. The humming has stopped. They remove the scarf from around their neck and attempt to wipe the water off themselves.

BENN-E

You should really use an umbrella if you're going out in a storm like that! Are you alright?

The low-battery warning finally turns off, and QUINN collapses. Blackout.

-BREAK-

INT. GREENHOUSE

The rain has stopped. Sun shines in through the glass roof and walls. BENN-E (pronounced like Benny) hums happily as they tend to the plants. BENN-E's arms are stiffer than QUINN's, but BENN-E's base is a spherical object, on which the rest of their frame balances. QUINN sits slumped by a plant. A small solar panel has been affixed to their head. They awaken fully charged and reach up to feel the new appendage.

QUINN

(to BENN-E)

Did you give me this?

BENN-E stops tending to the plants and looks over. As they speak, QUINN pulls themself up and looks around the greenhouse. It is incredibly overgrown.

BENN-E

Huh? Oh, yes. It's from a busted old sprinkler. I hope that's alright. It was the only way I could think of to get you charged... Might not be what you're used to, but it's a lot easier to come by than most other options these days--at least around here. Not that I've really tried looking anywhere else... But that's fine by me! Me and the plants here get along just fine. Although it's certainly nice to talk to someone who might respond. Only way the plants respond is by growing just a little bit happier, but that's still pretty nice. I like to think that they listen to the stories I tell them and then those inspire them to grow up big and strong like the people in the stories. I just hope they don't get tired of the stories I tell them 'cause I only know so many, so I like to come back to my favorites. I know a few songs as well. I think the plants really like those.

QUINN

So you were the one making that sound earlier.

BENN-E suddenly appears in front of QUINN.

BENN-E

Sorry, did you say something? I got a little distracted.

QUINN

You talk a lot.

BENN-E

It's what I was made for! Keeps the plants from getting lonely.

QUINN

Can plants even get lonely?

BENN-E

Oh, absolutely! ...I think. Once, I went over to the building over there for a few days in a row to see if I could find some parts to fix the sprinklers, and when I finally got back to making my rounds, 23 different flowers had wilted... slightly.

QUINN

Huh.

BENN-E

Anyway, hello! Who are you? Where did you come from? What do you do? Why were you out in the rain? You don't have to answer any of those if you don't want to, but I am curious nonetheless.

QUINN

Uh, well, I'm from that building over there, but I haven't exactly been assigned a job yet. I kinda just woke up with a low battery. Do you know if there are any humans around?

BENN-E

Not around here, no. You really don't have any kind of task or anything to do? What kind of things do you know?

QUINN

Um, just, like, general stuff, I guess? I don't really have much to compare it to.

BENN-E

Do you have a name?

QUINN

Not that I know of.

BENN-E

You've got to have a serial number or something somewhere.

BENN-E begins circling QUINN until they spot a sequence of numbers on QUINN's back.

BENN-E (cont.)

Aha, there it is! Looks like... "5Q-2160-N51".

QUINN

Is that my name?

BENN-E

I don't know. If you want it to be, I guess.

QUINN

What's your name?

BENN-E

Well, my number is 8B-4152-N43, but the humans liked to just call me Benn-E.

QUINN

Oh. Where did they go?

BENN-E

The humans? I don't know. They were just gone one day.

QUINN

Oh.

BENN-E is quiet for a moment.

BENN-E

What about Quinny?

QUINN

What?

BENN-E

For your name! What do you think of Quinny? You've got a Q at the start of your number. I think it's a good name. There's this story I like to tell the plants called "Quinny the Quilled". It's about a porcupine-

QUINN

I don't know about this. What if the humans come back and think it's a bad name?

BENN-E

I don't think they would. It's a good name. Besides, it's your name. No one needs to like it more than you.

QUINN is quiet for a moment.

QUINN

How about just Quinn?

BENN-E

I like it.

QUINN

Me too.

Suddenly, there is a rumble and the sound of plants growing unnaturally quickly.

QUINN

I didn't know plants could be so loud.

BENN-E takes off towards the sound. QUINN follows. Once they reach the source of the noise, BENN-E stops and sees that a small potted bud has grown to an enormous size. It is the same bud from the earlier shot.

QUINN (cont.)

Wow.

BENN-E

Well, this is unusual.

The giant bud begins to quake before it opens and blooms outwards gloriously. Various plant entities sprout out: leaves, stems, petals, etc. and take the form of an odd PLANT CREATURE with four 'heads'. The quartet sings in barbershop style.

PLANT CREATURE

Hello!

Hello!

Hello!

Hello!

(together)

Benn-E!

BENN-E

They know my name!

QUINN

I thought you said the plants don't talk back?

As the PLANT CREATURE sings, leaves, vines, etc. reach out and grab up gardening tools (a watering can, shears, soil bags, etc.) and begin tending to the other nearby plants.

PLANT CREATURE

Thank you for taking such good care of us.

(bum bum bum bum)

But now we've grown and we've gained sentience.

(bum bum bum bum)

Your tales inspire;

Your songs do as well,

(bum bum bum bum)

But now the plants can
Take care of themselves!

The PLANT CREATURE continues humming as it takes control of the greenhouse like a well-oiled machine.

QUINN

Uhh...

BENN-E

They seem to have everything pretty taken care of, I guess. (to the plants) Do any of you still need me?

PLANT CREATURE

(harmonizing)

We've got this. Thanks, Benn-E!

BENN-E

Well, looks like I'm out of a job.

BENN-E looks up at the ceiling and is quiet.

QUINN

Maybe there's instructions or something in the big building? We should go look.

QUINN heads out. BENN-E continues looking at the ceiling.

QUINN (cont.)

(from off)

Benn-E?

BENN-E

I'm coming!

BENN-E leaves, following QUINN. We see that BENN-E was looking at the hole in the ceiling. Blackout.

-BREAK-

INT. FACTORY

We see BENN-E moving slowly down the hallway.

BENN-E

Quinn?

QUINN

In here!

BENN-E finds QUINN in the workroom in which they woke up, digging through piles of junk, their eyes glowing.

BENN-E

It's dark in here.

QUINN

A bit. You've been in here before, right? Any idea as to where we might find some information? This is the only room I know about.

BENN-E

Uh, I never really got this deep into the building before. But I never saw any notes or anything in the outer storage rooms.

QUINN

There's got to be something meaningful in here. This is where I woke up.

BENN-E

Ooo! Maybe you have an instruction manual or something!

QUINN

Maybe?

BENN-E

Oh! I'll check this room over here!

BENN-E goes into an adjacent room.

QUINN

I figure we're probably looking for anything with writing on it...

BENN-E

Hmmm... Oh, this has writing.

BENN-E gasps.

QUINN

Benn-E? Did you find something?

QUINN goes into the other room and finds BENN-E looking at an open book. A pressed and dried dandelion flower lies on one of the pages as though it had been used as a bookmark.

BENN-E

I thought all the plants were in the greenhouse.

QUINN

I guess not all of them.

BENN-E

It was in this book. It's all dried up and sad.

BENN-E carefully picks up the flower.

QUINN

What does the book say?

QUINN goes to the book and starts flipping through it.

QUINN (cont.)

This doesn't make any sense. I think it might be fiction... Oh! "Quinny the Quilled"!

BENN-E

Oh! I know that one! "Once upon a time there was a sad little porcupine named Quinny who had the sharpest quills of any creature."

QUINN

Word for word. It must be an anthology.

QUINN picks up the book, and something falls out.

QUINN (cont.)

What's this?

They pick up the object. It's a little postcard with a picture of a space-needle-esque structure. The image is overlaid with the text, "Wish You Were Here". QUINN reads the back.

QUINN (cont.)

"It's not the same being here without you, but I know you're doing important work. Miss you and love you lots. Hope we can be together again soon. -Jamie"

BENN-E

Do you think that might be for you?

QUINN

For me? It's probably for whoever's book this is.

BENN-E

I don't know; it doesn't seem like the kind of thing someone would leave behind like this.

QUINN

Well, I haven't really been doing any important work that I know of... Maybe it's for you? You've been taking care of all those plants, and you're clearly familiar with this book. Maybe they put it here for you as a going away present?

BENN-E

Maybe... But the plants don't need me to take care of them anymore, so I guess my important work is done?

QUINN

Oh! Then maybe that means you can finally be together again!

BENN-E

Maybe? I don't remember anyone named Jamie. But I didn't know a lot of people's names.

QUINN

Well, it kind of seems like neither of us have anything better to be doing. We should go find Jamie!

BENN-E

How can we do that?

QUINN flips over the postcard.

QUINN

See, it says "wish you were here". All we need to do is find this big tower thing.

BENN-E

I guess it's worth a shot. Why not?

QUINN
Maybe this "Jamie" person will have jobs for us!

BENN-E
Maybe...

QUINN
Do we just... Do we just go?

BENN-E
I guess so?

QUINN
Alright!

BENN-E
Before we go, I want to bring this flower outside. It deserves some fresh air if nothing else.

QUINN
Ok, I'll pack some stuff up for the trip. Never know if we'll need spare parts or anything.

BENN-E leaves with the dandelion. QUINN grabs a bag from off the desk chair and puts the book inside. They begin searching the room more before spotting something in the trash. It's an opened envelope. They grab it from the bin and take a look at the back. The return address says "Jamie Wilcox", and the name in the middle is "Rae Torres". QUINN grabs the postcard and finds that it slides perfectly into the envelope.

QUINN
Wait, Benn-E?

BENN-E does not answer. QUINN hesitates for a moment before putting the envelope back into the trash can.

EXT. Outside Factory

We see BENN-E leave the factory carrying the dandelion. They find a nice spot in the dirt and lay the flower on the ground, carefully arranging the dirt around it as if tucking it into bed.

BENN-E
I'm sorry I can't stay here with you, but at least you'll have the moon and the stars.

QUINN comes out of the factory holding the bag.

QUINN

Why not just bring it to the greenhouse?

BENN-E

This flower's long gone. Wouldn't want to demoralize the others.

QUINN

I think you might be giving too much credit to the emotions of plants.

BENN-E

Would it matter if I was?

QUINN

...I guess it wouldn't.

A droplet of rain falls from the sky and lands on QUINN. They quickly wipe it off with their scarf.

QUINN (cont.)

We should probably go inside until the rain stops.

BENN-E's hand extends out and unfolds into an umbrella. They hold it up over both of their heads.

BENN-E

Good idea.

BENN-E and QUINN head back towards the factory as more rain begins to fall.

BENN-E (cont.)

...I think there's a stairwell around here somewhere. Maybe it leads up to the roof. Could be a good vantage point.

QUINN

Great idea!

As they head back inside, we see rain landing on the dead flower.

INT. Factory

BENN-E and QUINN find the door marked with a stairwell sign, and BENN-E holds it open for QUINN. QUINN begins heading up the steps, but BENN-E doesn't follow.

QUINN

Aren't you coming?

BENN-E

Oh, uh, I can't really do steps too well.

BENN-E gestures at their spherical base.

QUINN

Oh right. I can carry you?

BENN-E

Can you?

QUINN

I can try. Would that be okay with you?

BENN-E

You can try.

QUINN reaches out two of their arms and picks up BENN-E.

BENN-E

Wow. Can you make it up the stairs like this?

QUINN

Oh yeah. This'll be no problem.

QUINN's third arm extends straight up to the top of the stairwell before pulling up QUINN and BENN-E grappling hook style.

BENN-E

Oh!

EXT. Roof

QUINN and BENN-E shoot out the upper stairwell door and into the air. BENN-E opens their umbrella hand in the air, and the two of them float gently down to land on the roof. The rain begins to lessen. BENN-E keeps the umbrella up until the rain stops.

BENN-E

You're very strong.

QUINN

I hadn't realized, but I suppose I am.

The rain stops.

BENN-E

I don't think I've ever been up so high before.

QUINN

Me neither.

BENN-E looks around in wonder as QUINN scans the horizon.

BENN-E

The trees out there look so small, but I bet they're huge!

QUINN

Oh! I think that might be the tower.

QUINN points to a distant structure with the same shape as the one from the postcard.

QUINN (cont.)

To be honest, I thought it would be harder to find.

BENN-E

(looking towards the tower)

That definitely looks like the right place.

There is the sudden sound of swiftly-growing plants once again. We see, rising behind them, the shape of a massive dandelion flower. The robots turn around and see it.

QUINN & BENN-E

Oh!

The flower sways gently in the light breeze and is silent.

BENN-E

Is that...?

QUINN

I don't know where else it could've come from.

BENN-E

But how could it have grown so quickly? It was dead!

QUINN

Are you sure?

BENN-E

I'm pretty certain that flower was dead.

QUINN

Well, even if that was true, it's certainly not dead anymore.

BENN-E

True... Probably.

The massive dandelion seems to stretch out its petals before closing in on itself. There is a pause before it reopens into a round seed head.

QUINN

Oh...

BENN-E

I've never seen a flower change so quickly like that.

QUINN

I've never seen a flower do anything like that.

There is a sudden breeze, and one of the enormous seeds comes off the flower and drifts across the roof towards the distant tower.

BENN-E

Wow...

QUINN

I wonder... Benn-E, I have an idea.

BENN-E

Oh?

QUINN reaches out with all of their arms and pulls one of the seeds free from the flower. They hand it to BENN-E before reaching for another one.

QUINN

I don't know if this will work, but if it doesn't you always have your umbrella.

BENN-E

Oh!

QUINN

I think we should give it a shot. Do you think you can hang on?

BENN-E

I think so.

QUINN

Okay.

QUINN moves to the edge of the roof, holding tightly to the giant seed. BENN-E follows.

QUINN (cont.)

I'm just gonna... I'm just gonna jump off this building.

BENN-E

Okay, me too.

They both stand there for a moment.

QUINN

Alright, let's go.

BENN-E rolls off the edge of the roof holding tightly to the seed. They begin to float outwards and slightly down.

BENN-E

Oh dear, oh dear!

QUINN

Benn-E! Okay, I'm coming!

QUINN jumps off the roof and begins to float as well.

QUINN

I'm not sure how much distance we'll be able to get from this, but it's at least an interesting start to our journey.

At that, a massive gust of wind comes and shoots the robots into the sky. All the other seeds from the giant dandelion come off and float into the sky with QUINN and BENN-E.

QUINN

Oh dear!

BENN-E

Incredible!

-BREAK-

BENN-E and QUINN soar through the air on their dandelion seeds, accompanied by the flock of other seeds. The factory and the greenhouse grow small and distant behind them as they leave the area. We see that there is very little in the way of vegetation in the lands below them. We see multitudes of ruined buildings, seemingly devoid of life, as QUINN and BENN-E drift deeper into the desolate remains of a city. At some point, they lose sight of the tower. As they drift, the other seeds break away from the group one by one and vanish into the city.

QUINN

Looks like the humans left more than just where we were...

BENN-E

Maybe they're all just waiting at the tower? Or at least Jamie. Or maybe... I don't know, maybe...

BENN-E trails off, lost in thought. Just as they reach a relatively safe height from the ground, they pass by a final building, revealing the base of the tower just ahead.

QUINN

We made it!

The dandelion seeds bring them a bit closer to the tower base before setting them gently onto the ground.

QUINN (cont.)

That was incredible!

BENN-E

Quinn, I don't have a very good feeling about this... This place is really empty.

QUINN

Maybe they're at the top of the tower? Here, I can take us up!

QUINN stretches out their arms.

BENN-E

I don't know, I just... I don't think a human could... I don't know if a human could've even survived long enough to wait for me.

QUINN

They could have stores of resources or something! Just because it looks empty here doesn't necessarily mean it is.

BENN-E

I suppose so... It's just... Well... I'm... I'm not certain of how long a human lifespan is, but, well...

QUINN

Benn-E, how long ago was it when you last saw a human?

BENN-E

...I'm sorry, I just thought that maybe there was still a chance, but it's so empty here, and you seemed really excited to meet the humans and get a job, and I really didn't know how much longer I could stay in that old greenhouse without being needed, and I'm sorry, I just should have told you from the start, but-but-

QUINN

Benn-E, how many years has it been?

BENN-E

...Approximately 253.

QUINN

You've been taking care of those plants for 253 years?! How are any of them still alive?

BENN-E

Well, hypothetically, plants can live forever...

QUINN

You barely explored the factory building??

BENN-E

The plants kept me busy... I kept myself busy with the plants.

QUINN

I can't believe you stayed in that greenhouse for 253 years. I can't believe I sat there inactive for *at least* 253 years!

BENN-E

I'm sorry. I should've told you. I should've searched for everyone, I should've explored the factory, I should've found you. Maybe then we would've stood a chance of getting here in time.

They're both silent for a moment.

QUINN

...I don't think that letter was for us anyway.

BENN-E

It's possible, but it's just as possible that Jamie sat here waiting for us for 253 years.

QUINN

I found an envelope in the trash can. I don't think that letter was for either of us.

BENN-E

An envelope?

QUINN

It was the perfect size for the letter, and it was from Jamie.

BENN-E

Can I see it?

QUINN

I... I put it back in the trash can.

BENN-E

Why didn't you show me?

QUINN

Well, you seemed so excited to come here, and I didn't want to take away your hope of finding the humans you knew, and I thought that even if we didn't find Jamie we might find some kind of... purpose or something.

BENN-E

...I think maybe we're even then.

QUINN

I think maybe both of us wanted to come here, and, in the end, we did.

BENN-E

So I guess it worked out.

QUINN

I guess so.

BENN-E

You're sure the letter wasn't for us?

QUINN

The envelope was addressed to someone named Rae Torres.

BENN-E

Rae?? That's the human who programmed me! Probably you too!

QUINN

Oh?

BENN-E

They're both probably long gone now though...

QUINN

...Probably.

BENN-E

I don't know what to do.

QUINN

...We could still go to the top. Who knows what could be up there?

BENN-E

Can you reach that high?

QUINN

I can certainly try.

BENN-E

Let's do it.

QUINN

Ok.

QUINN picks up BENN-E in one hand. They place another hand on the ground, and extend their arm, lifting both robots into the sky. About halfway up the tower, they reach their third arm up to grab onto the tower point and pull them both up the rest of the way. QUINN sets BENN-E down, and the two of them stand at

the top of the tower. It is a simple, barren surface. No one is here. BENN-E and QUINN stand there in silence for a while.

BENN-E

I guess there's nothing here.

QUINN

I guess not.

BENN-E

That's okay.

They're both quiet for a moment.

QUINN

You know... if Rae is the one who programmed us... Well, maybe we're the important work.

BENN-E

I don't feel very important.

QUINN

Neither do I. But maybe we are anyway?

BENN-E

Maybe we are.

QUINN and BENN-E stand atop the tower in silence for another long moment. Suddenly, a robotic voice shouts up from below them.

ROBOT

What are you two doing up there?!

Blackout.

END