

The Blue Handprint

By: Joy P.

I've never been so scared in my life. Someone will be chosen. Since we live in the Republic of Mars, our society controlled by the AI government, has a tradition to "gift" a child to them every 10 years. No one knows what happens to the child, but they certainly do know that they will never return. As thousands of people in their own uniforms nervously gathered close around the auditorium, I remained in the back assuring myself that there was no chance that I would be selected. The chief AI officer stood behind the podium and began to speak in a monotone voice.

"Hello fellow citizens. Today is the day we select one child to take to the government." Without sparing a minute, the chief drew a small slip of paper containing the name of the selected child. The tension rose as parents hid their children behind their backs.

"Julius Scott, congratulations. You are the chosen one. We will now escort you to your destined location." Color drained from my face. Me? I was the chosen one? Parents sighed in relief while others whispered in pity. Shaking, I slowly walked towards the podium as people eyed me with deep sympathy. What felt worse was that I did not have a parent or guardian to cry over me. Who will pray for me to come back each night? Who will think of me each morning? I was an orphan all my life, so I didn't know how it felt to be loved. These were one of those moments that made me wish I had someone to lean my head and cry on. Although I've been through so many heart breaks, I still felt the cold drop of sorrow trickling down my colorless cheeks.

Stepping on to the stage, I tried to hide my teary face from the crowd. Before I realized, I was dragged to a hidden area in the city where I had never seen before. The area was malodorous. The smell of rusted bottles and cans filled the atmosphere. In the middle of the wastes, was a dome-like building that stood out from all the garbage. The sunlight reflected off the smooth, metal roof, and glared into my eyes as I entered the premises.

As soon as I walked in, I saw a long hallway leading to only one room. Looking at the walls were framed photos of children every 10 years. 2070...2080....2090.....I stopped. There was no picture for 2100. "Move it kid!" grunted the troop leader in a harsh tone. Increasing my pace, I made it in front of the lonely door. It was a metal door, with many locks lacing the right side including a strange blue handprint in the middle.

"What's that?" I asked. They did not answer, but only unlocked the latches by inserting various passcodes.

Just as I opened the door, cold air rushed through my face, giving me the chills. The middle of the room was where the cold vapor came from. It was a laboratory. Thick fog dispersed around the lab making my eyes watery and hard to see. As the room cleared up, a machine came in to view, only big enough to fit a single child inside. It was covered with glowing buttons, intimidating me every second. Scared, I turned to the troops.

“Do I have to go inside there?” The troop leader’s face instantly changed and smiled softly. “I promise that this will improve who you are and change your life.”

These words seemed to grasp my mind. If I was to take this opportunity and change, would I finally be loved? After all, finding a family who can hug me to school and kiss me goodnight was my priority.

“Ok,” I said eagerly, “I will go in.” Slowly, I stepped into the machine. Was this the turning point of a fresh new start? Could I finally get a chance to feel happiness? I felt my hands shaking and my heart pounding. Bright blue lights surrounded me as I closed my eyes. I was almost about to smile until the sound of beeps and buzzes grew louder. All at once it got cold as ice.

Have they deceived me? Frightened at that thought, I opened my eyes to see blue splotches scattered around me. As my eyes adjusted to the light, the blue splotches morphed into a clear shape. Handprints! Hundreds of different sized blue handprints were stamped on the walls identical to the one I saw on the metal door.

“Get me out of here!” I frantically screamed.

But I knew it was too late. I could feel my skin tightening and my vision growing dim. My head seemed to get heavier as I felt myself shrink. I banged my hand against the wall, leaving a fresh new blue handprint that blended in with all the others...