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Prose

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Chosen

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Freeland High School

Freeland, Michigan

Grade: 11-12

Genre: Creative

Second place in the Creative genre for the 2013 Best Midwestern High School Writing Competition.

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Ever since I was a little girl my daddy has raised me for the day he could give me away to Jesus. I remembered the first moment he held me up in his arms and murmured, “You Elita, you are the chosen. Your life shall be a living symbol of our unwavering devotion.”

The soft clanging of church bells brought me a new awareness. My mother was crying softly what seemed a lifetime away. My lips tightened into a small pout and my eyebrows furrowed. Why was she crying? Shouldn’t she be happy? I wanted to reach out to her, to hold her. I could imagine the soft fabric of her dress enveloping me, saturated in scents of warm vanilla and laundry. I knew she had been working this morning; the Sabbath was the only day of rest in the Colony.

“Elita, my baby girl,” her voice cracked between sobs. “Please Lord, she’s just a little girl. Deliver her. Give her back to me, she’s just a child.” Her bun, which she usually wore in a flawless plait, was winding its way out from behind her bonnet, uncharacteristic flyaways loosely tucked behind her ears.

My father’s broad shoulders enclosed her, steadying her and holding her back firmly. He talked in hushed whispers. The look on his face was that of which he used to when scolding me and Nathaniel. Soon her sobs turned to silent whimpers. With his grasp firmly tightened around her wrist he led her to the pew where the rest of the colony women had gathered before leaving to join the men.

“It’s okay Momma,” I whispered.

I was separated from the scene, each of its characters untouchable to me. A thin white haze swathed my vision, disconnecting me from those I had spent the entirety of my eleven years with.

Impishly I shook my head and let out a giggle, my braids swinging about my face. Someday I would plait my hair into a bun like Mamma, but I was still a child. I watched the deep mahogany of the church filled with people. Sun streamed through the stained-glass windows. Scarlet, turquoise, and violets pooled on the floor illuminating the path to Him. This was the day my father had prepared me for. The somberness of the church contrasted to the carefree gaiety of my own mood.

The delicate dress wove its way around my body. There were no curves to hug as there would have been on a woman. The white dress’s fabric was much more luxurious than anything I had seen before, a chain of daisies surrounding my head. The soft lace showed nothing but a peep of shoulder. Whatever existence I had in this moment was like awaking from a dream, fragile and incomplete. People and faces swam softly without definite form, taking on a reverie like quality.

Three years ago, in this same church I had also worn a white dress. The day of my Christening I had been but one of my age group, just another young girl of a dozen. Reverend Smith had always shown a more peculiar interest in my upbringing than the others my age. It was him who had given me my new name, Elita, meaning chosen. Father had caught me in the orchard before the ceremony, dirt streaked down my dress.

“Look what you’ve done!” I still remembered his bellowing voice and how it had shook my childhood frame. “You’re not a little girl anymore. This is the day you become a woman. Grow

up.” Upon inspection of my dress his anger rekindled. “Don’t you understand what you’ve done? You’ve ruined yourself! No one will want a girl like you.” He had given me a harsh smack across the arm and towed me home to my mother who met me red eyed at the door.

Reverend Smith had eyed my dress disapprovingly as I walked through the mahogany doors of the church. My father sent me away but as I skipped to meet the other boys and girls I couldn’t help but pick up on their conversation.

“I ask for your forgiveness. She is still young. I’ve prayed for strength, the ability to teach her submission, but her spirit is strong.” I heard Father use a pleading tone I had never heard before, his eyes were downcast.

“She is to become a woman today. The other children still have time, but her upbringing is of the utmost importance. I will teach her submission if you will not, whatever it takes. Pray that God may drive the sin from your life that you may father her more effectively. As I have told you, she is the chosen. Are you not absolute in your devotion?”

“Yes, of course Reverend. Anything it takes.”

This was the moment I knew I had been marked. Those who were chosen were often wed to the highest of religious leaders in the neighboring colonies. Being chosen was the only way in, or out of the colony. The rarity of the situation itself was significant. There had not been a choosing amongst the colonies in twenty-seven years.

That night the Reverend had visited me. It was the first of many visits in the years that came.

“You see Elita, God has asked me to show you His way.”

“Why not the other children?” I had asked.

“Elita, you are special, you are chosen.” He smiled with his snaggle tooth grin, placing his worn palm on my thigh. “And God has asked me to let you show your love for Him in a special way.”

Hardly would three days would pass without a night visit from the Reverend. He drilled me on my scriptures and recitations. But all too often I would fall prey to his hungry hands and molesting eyes. “You are chosen Elita, you must never forget. God has selected you to become that of one of His most prized”

I didn’t forget. Chosen was my way out of the colony, my escape. How little could my new colony know of what I was leaving behind?

The creaking of the floorboards indicated my mother’s arrival. It was always after the door had steadfastly closed behind the Reverend and my father’s breathing found the patterns of sleep.

“Shhh. Sleep Elita, close your eyes and sleep. It’s okay, you will leave the colony soon,” she would murmur softly. Many mornings found her red eyed and weary, a fact she took great care to cover up.

The church bells chimed again signaling half past twelve and bringing me back to the present. Today I would find out to whom I had been promised. Though I wasn’t sure what this entailed, I knew anything was better than going back to my home, my father’s disdainful gestures, and the Reverend’s lessons.

Suddenly the heavy doors in front of me open and I knew that it was time. Down the aisle I could see the vagueness of a figure. As I approached closer and closer, it seemed as if all the eyes in the colony were on me, boring into my very being. The veil, thick unlike that of the modern tradition, obscured my view, allowing me to see only a vague outline. My heart quickened as the figure lifted the veil from my eyes, all mistiness and sense of detachment lifting. I was about to become eye to eye with my chooser, the one who to who I would be joined with. My heart swelled with hope.

“Elita, you have been chosen,” I heard Reverend Smith’s voice say. The hands holding my own were ones that knew me well, weathered with work and age. My new life was about to begin. As I lifted my eyes to my much awaited savior, I was met with an all too familiar snaggle toothed smile. I had been chosen and for me there would be no choice.