

## growth spurt | Candace Monique Robertson

Eleven-year-old Hannah was experiencing a growth spurt—bones stretched to knobs of knees and elbows—making every feature on her face appear oversized. She blamed her mother, Beatrice, obviously. In order to fill things in, the little girl loved to sneak into the refrigerator after her parents were fast asleep to devour finger scoops of mashed potatoes, icing, and pudding.

But one night, the square kitchen suddenly came aglow when a 180-pound version of Hannah blocked the exit, her fists perched on flannel hips. “You keep eating like that, and it’ll give you nightmares.”

“You never give me enough at dinner.”

“Everybody’s got to eat, not just us growing girls.” She patted her belly button before sliding the bowl from Hannah’s grip. “So suck the flavor from your fingertips until morning, because it’s time to go to bed.”

“You’re so mean.”

“You keep saying that, and it might come true.”

As Hannah adjusted her head atop her Barbie pillowcase, she flicked her thumb as her mother passed in the hallway, then slipped into the most vivid dream.

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In the kitchen, Hannah’s nervous tremble set her knife a-clatter inside of a nearly empty jelly jar. She heard her mother’s throaty sigh coming from the front door. Spreading her sandwich with a little jelly at a time, she pinned her gaze upon the bread as her mother allowed a chuckle to splash across her plump glossed mouth. Beatrice sauntered around the table, in the center of the room, letting her three-inch heels drag and click.

There were still warm pots and pans spread out all over the robin’s egg-colored tablecloth, all filled with food Hannah had prepared. Beatrice sucked her teeth, peeked into a dish of roasted ham, then peas, and slammed the lids shut. Hannah shuddered. The aromas from the dishes began to mingle in the air with the freshly-mopped floor and Hannah’s apple jelly sandwich.

Dusk fell outside the window above the sink, splotching the kitchen with cruel blue-gray light. Hannah began to fold away from her mother’s shadow.

“Huh,” Beatrice loudly cleared her throat and moved to the

sink behind her daughter. Clicking her manicured nails along the metal edge, she tilted her head back as she peered down the bridge of her nose. “You’re getting too big for your britches, little girl.”

“Ma’am?”

“You heard what the hell I said.” Her lips curled into her coffee stained teeth.

Hannah turned briefly to see her mother’s lowered chin massaging her chest. She knew that thoughts of punishment circled in her mother’s falling beehive. As she turned away, her mother absentmindedly circled scuffs onto the clean terracotta squares. Beatrice threw her head back to enjoy a good old country gut buster. And then, stealing another glance at Hannah, she gently tugged the curtains one inch from closed.

“Didn’t I cook before I left?”

“That was lunch, mama. I got hungry again.”

Beatrice aligned her stare with the shadowy mouth of the sink, adjusted her too-tight skirt suit, and whipped around to her daughter. She dug her thick nails into the girl’s wrist with one hand while stretching for the garbage disposal switch with the other. Her heels shuffled, clopped and mocked a haunting jig.

“Mama, please stop!” Hannah leaned against the pull of her mother’s tightening grip. Her holey socks could not keep up.

“Give me those fingers!”

When Beatrice’s long digits finally tickled the switch, she grinned at the ragged gurgle and grind of the metal teeth. She gave Hannah one final jerk, and watched her fly to her side.

“You’ll never touch my food again without permission.”

Beatrice pushed the girl’s fingers towards the spinning blades. Drrr.

“Mama!”

Hannah collapsed, consumed with pain. The fire in her fingertips surged up her left arm, to her chest, to gradually flood her head with every jolt of her young heartbeat. Spurts and specks of crimson were flung all about the kitchen’s fading evening light.

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“Mmaaaa!!” Hannah sprang out of bed and ran to lock her bedroom door before sliding her potato-scooping fingers into her mouth to check if they were still there.