**Lend A Hand**

I sat watching the evening news on the television as I did everyday after school. The light green - or maybe it’s mint? - sofa always melds perfectly to my pudgy, square shape. We’ve had this sofa for as long as I can remember, and the livingroom has been set up in the same way since forever too.

The leading story on this evening’s news features the newest “Grand Deeds Award©” winner, Nicole Daniels. She walks onto the stage so poised and happy. Her dress is redder than a firetruck, and the fingernails on six of her arms match it: the other six are painted white to match her shoes. So coordinated. She must have a stylist. I wish I had a stylist. My mother used to help me pick out my clothes in the morning because apparently stripes and polka dots don’t go together and wearing solely different shades of purple isn’t classy. But she doesn’t understand how difficult it is to find clothes with only two arm holes.

I barely even notice when my mama walks into the room. She’s got a cup in each of her four hands.

“Hey Olivia, I wasn’t sure whether you would want some water or tea, so I brought both.” She set both cups on the small coffee-table-that-isn’t-really-a-coffee-table in front of me. My grandmama gave us this table right after my grandpop died. She said his ghost told her he didn’t like the table. I don’t know if she can actually talk to grandpop’s ghost or not, but it is a nice table. My grandmama has eight arms. She got her eighth just a few months after grandpop died because she started volunteering in the soup kitchen every Sunday after church. Oh, and she also started going to church. I’m surprised she hasn’t won a “Grand Deeds Award©” yet.

**“**Thanks mama,” I smile. I look at her extra arms in awe. She already had three when I was born, but I remember when she got her fourth. She’s a teacher at my old elementary school, and she started voluntarily tutoring kids with special needs on weekends. The fourth arm sprouted at the fifth grade graduation of a few of the kids she had been tutoring. It was quite a scene. Well, to me at least; I had never seen a growing before. It’s a magical experience, really. Mama glowed like an angel and it sprouted in seconds.

“I helped a girl at school today pick up all of her books after she dropped them. They were all over the hallway. I mean, like, everywhere, and I picked up every single one. Even the one that landed in the puddle outside of the bathroom.” My big, cheesy smile spread from ear to ear, but I could feel the tears welling inside my eyes.

“That’s great Liv!” She turned towards me, expecting to see my new third arm: the third arm I have been trying to grow since I was five. The third arm I have been trying to grow for a decade now. I got the Cheshire Cat grin from her I realize as her’s slowly turns upside down.

“I didn’t get an arm.” I state the obvious. Why can’t I grow my third arm? I do good deeds all the time. I hold the door open for strangers every time. One time I held the door open for Oprah. But did I get my third arm? No. Oprah was nice though. She told me she liked my shirt. Of course, I don’t think she could see my shirt around her 20 arms.

“Mama! Mama! Guess what!” My brother Reed bursts through the front door adorned in baseball attire, with my papa right behind. They have the same toothy smile. My papa doesn’t even have the chance to close the front door before Reed holds his arms up in the air.

“Look what I got! Look what I got!” A fresh, beautiful - okay it isn’t actually beautiful, it’s kind of short and chubby - fully mobile arm is protruding from my baby - well, eight year old - brother’s stomach region. It made a hole right in his baseball uniform. I giggle because the hole is right through the “O” in the word DRAGONS written across the front of the jersey. All six eyes were on me before I could even blink. All of their expressions turned to stone. It was like they all had seen a ghost or something. Maybe they could see grandpop’s ghost too. That would suck if I was the only one who couldn’t see his ghost on top of only having two arms.

“Olivia Ivy. Don’t laugh at your brother. It’s not his fault you haven’t grown your third arm yet. Keep the jealousy to yourself.” My papa was pointing at me with all six arms. He has six because he was in the military for like 20 years or something. He joined when he was 16 and saved a bunch of people in Vietnam. He doesn’t like to talk about his time there, so all I know I’ve learned from reading the plaques he receives and the medals he has.

“I’m working at the homeless shelter tomorrow after school. I hope that’s okay.” I say even though no one is listening because everyone is fascinated by Reed’s new arm. Reed is the perfect little boy. He’s kind to everyone and he’s athletic and he has really blue eyes and he looks just as handsome as my papa. I look like my mama: honey skin and chocolate hair and eyes. My mama used to say I looked as sweet as pie. Or maybe it was cake.

The homeless shelter is just three blocks from my school, so I was there five minutes before my shift started. The homeless shelter is a sad building. A sad building is a monotone colored one that just looks like it frowns all of the time. It’s a stark contrast to my school. My school is a happy, bright building. Putting on the gloves and apron have become motions I can do with my eyes closed nowadays.

“Welcome back, Olivia!” Alfred, the head cook at the shelter booms. Alfred is a big man with a squirrel for a mustache and roses on his cheeks. “Maybe today will be the lucky day.” He glances at my arms.

“I sure hope so.” I mumble and get on the assembly line.

The shift ends quickly, and I’m home just as dinner is served. My mama makes the best dinners, and always in record time. It’s probably because she can do four actions at once. Tonight she made meatloaf. But it’s not actually meat. It’s tofu. We’re vegetarian.

“So, does anyone have any news to share?” My papa says as everyone looks at me.

“I didn’t grow my third,” I look down at my plate. I can feel everyone’s eyes lower. “I just don’t understand. I do all of these good deeds, and still nothing. I mean all Reed did was let Max’s brother, the one in the wheelchair, take his turn at bat. I mean that’s really selfless and kind, and he didn’t have to do that, but it was one act! One! I’ve been volunteering at the shelter for months!” My cheeks felt like lava and my tears were a river. I could hear the sizzling as they rushed down my face. I left the tofloaf on my plate and headed straight for my room. I used to share it with my brother, but then I entered high school and begged my parents to let me have the spare room. I like the spare room. It has yellow walls.

I throw myself on my bed with my shoes and clothes from the day still on. I take a deep breath and hear a shaky, old, familiar voice.

“Olive, baby.” I sit straight up. There’s only one person that has ever called me Olive.

“Grandpop!” He started calling me Olive because when I was little all I ever ate was olives. Well, I ate other foods too, but grandpop always had olives for me at every meal. I think he wanted me to eat olives because of the irony that my name is Olivia and he could call me Olive.

“Olive! My little Olive! Look at you! You’re a mess.” I look at him questioningly. He only has four arms, which is very low considering he lived to be 94. “Olive, you’re beautiful.” He saw I was still confused, “Show it, doll!” And with that, he vanished into thin air. I guess I can talk to ghosts. And grandpop’s just appeared to tell me to clean up. Cool. I fell asleep thinking about what grandpop had said. Maybe he made a point? Maybe my Pop-Tart mornings were the reason I had gained 15lbs since freshmen year and always felt exhausted by mid morning. Maybe my eyeliner, so thick Reed would call me a racoon from time to time, was in fact too much. Maybe my typical outfit of a hoodie and sweatpants didn’t show off my bright, creative personality. I liked clothes. I liked to design them. I had dozens of personally designed and sewn dresses and shirts and skirts all around my room, waiting to be worn.

The next morning I did more primping than I usually did in the mornings. I brushed my hair and didn’t apply the eyeliner. I opted for a green, knee-length babydoll dress I had made beginning of freshman year, and tossed my navy hoody into the laundry: a place it needed to be thrown, I realized after smelling it, a long long time ago. I caught a glance of myself in the mirror in my room and couldn’t speak. I just stood there - staring. Staring at my arms I had hid for so long, and my big, brown eyes that I had been covering up. I felt physically beautiful for the first time in a while. The mirror was another reason why I loved the spare room. It took up a whole wall. I used to draw pictures of me with 100 arms on it with Expo markers.

I wanted to feel as good inside as I did on the outside. I ate scrambled eggs and a glass of milk for breakfast - as opposed to my typical Pop-Tart and soda - and was out the door ten minutes early. School went by quickly because I paid attention in every single class and made sure to hold the door open for everyone and helped a boy clean up the milk he spilled in the cafeteria when he dropped his tray. Still no third arm.

I went back to the homeless shelter again after school, and went through the motions of putting on my gloves and apron, when all of a sudden, my stomach felt like it was being pulled. I screamed and lifted my apron to reveal a fresh, honey colored arm protruding from my abdomen. Alfred had rushed out from the back of the kitchen at the sound of my scream.

“What is going….oh! Oh! Olivia! You got it! You got the arm!” It was true. I got the arm. I could serve the mashed potatoes, steamed carrots, and garlic asparagus at the same time. I could help more people. Probably 10,000 in just one day. I skipped home. I haven’t skipped since I was six. I waved all three arms high in the air and felt the air through all 15 fingers. 15 beautiful fingers: on three beautiful arms.