

HOLDING ESTHER

Written by

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For

RiverCross-TWR

Naomi and Maria are using different activities with the girls. The tone is generally upbeat.

47      MARIA'S HOUSE - LIVING AREA      47

Girls come through door.

MARIA

How was school?

ESTHER

Fine. But I have a lot of homework.

MARIA

Well, do your afternoon chores and then I'll help you with your spelling while you help me with dinner.

Music sting.

48      OUTSIDE      48

Girls are playing volleyball.

Several are running after ball.

NAOMI

Zula, you know the rules. You can't go out of bounds.

ZULA

It was only for a second.

NAOMI

We play by the rules. We need boundaries in volleyball, and in life. Now, the ball goes to the other team.

Music sting.

49 SHOP 49

SHOPKEEPER

Here. Some bread, Sarah. Come back tomorrow and I'll have more for you.

SARAH

Yes...yes, sir.

50 LIVING AREA 50

NAOMI

Do you remember your verse for this week, Elena?

ELENA

"Cast all your cares upon him because he cares for you." First Peter 5:7.

NAOMI

Very good.

Music sting.

51 OUTSIDE 51

NAOMI

Okay girls, has everyone picked out their rocks.

CHORUS OF GIRLS

Yes.

NAOMI

Now choose one out that describes a happy memory in your life. And tell us about it. Maybe it's pretty...or speckled...or unusual-looking...

They shuffle through their rocks as she talks.

ESTHER

This ones shiny and smooth. It reminds me  
of my mother.

NAOMI

Oh Esther, tell us about her.

Music sting.

52

SHOP

52

Door dings as someone enters store.

MAN

Richard, you have some maize today?

SHOPKEEPER

Over in the back.

MAN

Good.

(noticing)

Oh...is this the girl you talked about.

SHOPKEEPER

Yes. Sarah is her name.

(beat)

Would you be interested?

MAN

C'mere, girl. Let me have a look at you.

Beat.

MAN (CONT'D)

What? I said come here.

SARAH

Yes....Sir.

Music sting.

53 MARIA'S HOUSE - LIVING AREA

53

Girls are finishing up a song.

MARIA

That's all for our Bible study time tonight.  
Auntie Naomi, how about you pray and  
we'll head to bed.

NAOMI

Father in Heaven, thank you for this  
beautiful day you've given us, and for  
each of these precious girls. We pray that  
you would show your love to each one of  
them...

Voice fades out. Music bridge.

54 VOLLEYBALL SCENE

54

ZULU

Get the ball! It's going out of bounds.

GIRL 2

Hurry, Esther!

ZULU

Elena has it!

MARIA

Watch out, girls!

They crash into each other, and Esther falls down on top of Elena.

ESTHER

(laughs)

Oh, no...

Other girls laugh, too.

ELENA

(in panic)

Get off me! Get off me, Esther. Get off!

Esther gets off her.

ESTHER

(serious)

Sorry, Elena. I was only trying to get the ball, I didn't mean--

ELENA

Just get away from me. Get away from me!

She runs inside.

NAOMI

I'll go talk to her.

MARIA

Thank you Naomi.

Naomi leaves.

Esther turns to Maria.

ESTHER

What did I do, Auntie Maria? It was an accident.

MARIA

It's okay, Esther. It's not you--it's what's going on inside Elena.

ESTHER

What do you mean?

MARIA

Everyone has different comfort levels on how close others can be to them. It's not your fault at all.

ESTHER

I know Elena doesn't like to be touched. Even when I accidentally brush against her, she jumps.

MARIA

It's why I always ask you girls if I can hug you before I hug you. Or hold your hand, or put my arm around you. I don't want to startle you or make you feel uncomfortable.

ESTHER

Sometimes I like it when you hug me--but sometimes I don't want you to.

MARIA

Yes, which is why even if it's fine one time, it might not be the next time. So I ask every time.

ESTHER

I feel bad for hurting Elena's feelings--but it was an accident.

MARIA

No one's blaming you. We know you didn't mean it. But it likely triggered a bad memory for Elena, and she just needs some space to deal with those memories. Naomi will help her.

Smash cut to...

55

ELENA'S ROOM

55

Naomi is talking with Elena, as they sit on Elena's bed.

NAOMI

(soothingly)

Take a deep breath, Elena, and count backwards.

ELENA

5....4....3.....2.....1.

NAOMI

You're okay. You're safe.

ELENA

I got so scared.

NAOMI

Because Esther was on top of you.

ELENA

Yes...I just...I had to get out of there!

(beat)

I don't want to talk about it.

NAOMI

Okay, but if you ever want to, I'd be happy to listen.

ELENA

(listless)

Okay.

(beat)

I'm just really mad at Esther. I can't stand her.

NAOMI

I think you might be mad at someone else-- someone who hurt you perhaps? But you're directing your anger at Esther.

(MORE)



NAOMI (CONT'D)

(beat)

What might have happened to make you angry?

Silence.

NAOMI (CONT'D)

Someone hurt you, Elena. And it's okay that you're angry at them.

ELENA

I don't know...

NAOMI

Your body belongs to you. God gave it to you. And no one should touch you in a way that makes you feel uncomfortable or unsafe. You can always, always say 'No' because it's your body.

ELENA

But...it's not that easy.

NAOMI

I know.

ELENA

Because if it's adults. And it's men...

NAOMI

When it comes to your body--if you feel uncomfortable--you can always say 'no'. Even to an adult!

ELENA

I hate men.

NAOMI

Some of them can be really scary. But not all of them.

ELENA

They are all scary to me.

NAOMI

What about Dr. Ngabire? What do you think about him?

ELENA

He seems nice. But...I don't know.

NAOMI

Well, he is one of the good men. He treats women with respect, he's kind, and unselfish. But sometimes it is hard to tell. Someone might act kind at first, and then hurt you later. So we need to watch out for these things, but there are trustworthy men out there. There are good men who love their wives and families.

ELENA

But how do we know who's really good, and who's pretending?

NAOMI

That might be a good conversation for our discussion time. We could talk to all the girls about it.

ELENA

Yes.

(hesitant)

I'd like that.

NAOMI

I'll mention it to Auntie Marie.

So, do you want to talk about anything else?

ELENA

No...I just want to think for a while.

NAOMI

Okay. I really enjoy talking with you Elena.  
Can I give you a hug?

ELENA

I'm...I would rather not right now.

NAOMI

That's okay. You know what? In fact, it's  
good. You're learning to say no if you're  
not comfortable with something. Well  
done!

Music bridge.

56

OUTSIDE IN GARDEN

56

Elena comes outside while Esther is digging in garden.

ELENA

Hi, Esther.

ESTHER

Elena! I'm sorry about what happened with  
knocking into you...

ELENA

It's okay. I don't even know what  
happened. I...I suddenly felt something  
scary. It reminded me of...I can't even  
explain it. I know it wasn't your fault--but  
it made me angry with you.

ESTHER

I kind of understand. I get that way, too.  
Even with feeding the chickens. I'm angry  
with them--even with Maria--for making  
me do it. Just because it reminds me  
of...of things that happened before.

ELENA

Maria calls them 'triggers.'

ESTHER

Yes, I've heard her say that. Things that happen now that remind us of painful thing that happened earlier.

ELENA

Right.

ESTHER

But, I still wanted to let you know that I'm sorry. So...I have something for you.

She gets something out of pocket of her skirt.

ELENA

What is it?

ESTHER

A doll.

ELENA

It's...it's like yours! With the rice sack and the silk hair!

ESTHER

Do you like it?

ELENA

Yes...is it really for me?

ESTHER

I made it for Sarah. A long time ago. Thinking when she returned, I'd give it to her. I thought she'd like it.

ELENA

But she never came back.

ESTHER

Not yet. But this doll needs someone and...and I thought you might need someone, too.

ELENA

Thank you, Esther. And if--when--Sarah returns, I'll give it to her.

ESTHER

This one is yours. When Sarah gets back, I'll make her another one.

Music bridge...

57

ON STREET

57

Man is giving Sarah some coins.

MAN

There! Now get out of here!

SARAH

Yes...yes, Sir.

Rumble of thunder. Sarah runs off.

SARAH (CONT'D)

(sniffs)

Oh, Esther...I wish you were here. I miss you.

Downpour of rain.

SARAH (CONT'D)

(to self)

I need to get out of this rain...find someplace dry.

She goes into a store entrance. We hear rain hit tin roof instead.

SARAH (CONT'D)

Hopefully, I can wait here for a while.

Uncle is coming out of store. Bell over shop door rings as he leaves.

UNCLE

(calling back to shopkeeper)

I'll pay you next time, Jaheem. Just give me more time.

(runs into Sarah)

Oof. Watch where your--wait.

Silence.

UNCLE (CONT'D)

Look at me, girl.

SARAH

(sniffs

Beat as she looks at him.

UNCLE

(laughs)

Oh, my. In this whole big city, I find you.

SARAH

(swallows, scared)

Uncle..

Ominous music bridge takes us up to...

58

MARIA'S HOUSE

58

Naomi calls for Esther and Elena.

NAOMI

Esther, Elena! Come here please.

Girls rush in from other room.

ESTHER  
Yes, Auntie Naomi?

NAOMI  
I need you two to run an errand for me.

ELENA  
What is it?

NAOMI  
I need you to pick up a package at the post office. There might just be a surprise for you girls in there...

ESTHER  
Really? What is it?

NAOMI  
If I told you, it wouldn't be much of a surprise would it?

The girls groan.

NAOMI (CONT'D)  
(laughs)  
You'll see when you get back. Don't peek.

Music sting.

59

ON STREETS OF TOWN

59

Elena and Esther are returning with the package.

ELENA  
What do you think it is?

She shakes the box.

ESTHER

Don't shake it. It might break.

ELENA

You think it's glass? Like new dishes?

ESTHER

I have no idea, but I don't want to risk breaking it--whatever it is.

ELENA

I'm so curious. Maybe it's a new broom. We need one of those.

ESTHER

Well, it's not big enough for a--

She stops mid-sentence, seeing something.

ELENA

Esther? Esther, what is it? You look like you've seen a ghost.

ESTHER

Hide. Hide now. Behind this car!

They run behind a car.

ELENA

What is it? Tell me.

ESTHER

(trying to convince self, not really hearing Elena)

Probably nothing. Probably just one of those trigger things Maria talks about.

ELENA

What is?



ESTHER

It's just a truck--it doesn't have to be his truck.

ELENA

A truck? Whose?

ESTHER

But it looked so much like it.

(to Elena)

Get down, Elena! He can't see us.

ELENA

Who? Esther, please tell me what's wrong!

ESTHER

That truck on the other side of the road. It looks like my uncle's truck and he's---well, he's not a good person.

ELENA

(understanding)

Oh.

ESTHER

(growing panic)

He can't see me. If he did, oh Elena, if he did I don't know what he would do...

ELENA

It's okay. You're okay.

ESTHER

(reminding self)

Yes. Deep breath.

ELENA

We'll go back the other way, just in case it is his. But...

(she peeks out)

It looks like he's inside the store anyway.

There's no one in the driver's seat.

ESTHER

It's empty?

ELENA

Yes...I think. It's hard to tell. Wait, there's someone in the passenger seat--but it's only a girl.

ESTHER

A girl? What does she look like?

ELENA

I can't tell. The truck is too far away. Let's just leave.

ESTHER

Wait, let me see...

She peeks out from the car.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

(gasp)

It's Sarah. Sarah's in the truck!

Ominous music bridge.

60

MARIA'S HOUSE - KITCHEN

60

Maria walks into kitchen where Naomi is looking for a towel. Opening and shutting cupboard drawers. She's under the table looking for it.

MARIA

Naomi? What are you doing down there?

NAOMI

I'm losing my mind.

MARIA

And you're looking for it under the table?

NAOMI

No...I'm looking for a towel I've lost. I've looked everywhere. It's just disappeared.!

She gets up.

MARIA

It will show up. Perhaps one of the girls borrowed it.

NAOMI

I wish they would ask first. But I guess that's my excuse for not drying dishes.

MARIA

Are Esther and Elena out picking up the package?

NAOMI

Yes...I said they could go after finishing their chores. They should return soon.

Music sting.

61 PARKING LOT

61

Esther and Elena are hiding behind the car watching Sarah.

ESTHER

I have to go get her.

ELENA

Are you crazy? You just said yourself, if your uncle saw you--

ESTHER

I have to, Elena. It's my sister. Wait here.

She runs over to the truck. Opens door.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Sarah! Sarah! It's me! Come with me!

SARAH

(groggy)

What....who?

ESTHER

Wake up! What's wrong with you?

SARAH

(slurring)

I...you need to go...

ESTHER

Are you drunk? You smell like...never mind. Get out. Hurry!

SARAH

(slurring, slow)

No...no...you go. Go.

(coughing fit)

ESTHER

I'm not leaving without you. I have a safe place for us.

Pulling on her.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

Get out.

SARAH

(slurring)

Let go. He's coming...see?

ESTHER

(desperate)

No.

SARAH

Hurry...he's coming back...you have to leave.

(coughs again)

ESTHER

(frantic, verge of tears)

But...I...Sarah!

(seeing uncle, not sure what to do)

Uh. Oh...

She runs back to where Elena is. Door slams shut.

ELENA

What happened? Where is she?

Hear truck loudly turn over and run. Drive off with a squeal.

ESTHER

Oh, Sarah...Sarah, Sarah, Sarah....

Music bridge.

62 MARIA'S HOUSE

62

Esther is crying as she explains what happened with Sarah.

ESTHER

There was time! She could have come with me. If...if she would have gotten out of the truck. If only she'd gotten out of the truck!

MARIA

I'm sorry, Esther. So sorry. I'm guessing Sarah was feeling trapped.

ESTHER

But she wasn't! The door was unlocked!  
But she wouldn't leave.

MARIA

I know this is hard to understand, but sometimes the worst traps aren't made with locks on them. People can be trapped with lies, with pain, by alcohol...

ESTHER

She smelled like beer.

MARIA

Your uncle is choosing to do evil. He will fight to control her at all costs. And getting her addicted to alcohol or drugs is one of those ways.

ESTHER

(shaking head, remembering)

She was so pale. And that blank look on her face...she hardly looked at me...

MARIA

She's been told lies. About being worthless, useless, unimportant. And when you're told that enough, and treated that way enough, you believe it. Instead of trusting who God says you are.

ESTHER

It's like...she wasn't even the same person.

(sniffs, looks up)

Is she gone forever?

MARIA

I don't know, Esther. I hope not.

ESTHER

I should be happy she's alive. That's what I've been most worried about. For two years I've wondered every day if she's dead! But...but, this feels almost worse to have her alive but not...but not her.

(MORE)

ESTHER (CONT'D)

(sob)  
I need to go.

She runs upstairs.

MARIA

Oh...Esther...

She runs upstairs.

63

MARIA'S HOUSE - OUTSIDE ESTHER'S DOOR

63

Maria knocks on door.

MARIA

Esther, may I come in?

Door opens.

ESTHER

Yes.

Sits beside Esther.

MARIA

Let's talk.

ESTHER

Am I in trouble?

MARIA

No no no, I just want to hear whatever  
you're thinking about.

ESTHER

You know how you're always telling me to  
think about my feelings and name them--  
so they wouldn't have so much power over  
me?

MARIA

Yes.

ESTHER

Well, I've been thinking about that.

MARIA

That's so good. So what emotions are you feeling?

ESTHER

Lonely. I miss my mama and papa. And Sarah.

MARIA

That must be very hard. I can understand why you'd feel lonely. Is there anything else you're feeling?

Beat.

ESTHER

Sad.

(pause)

Very, very sad.

(breaks into tears)

Esther is finishing up her cry. But still sniffing and teary.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

I...I...

MARIA

You don't need to explain. It's okay. It's good. Crying is a way of releasing our emotions. It's important. Even Jesus cried.

ESTHER

But it doesn't do anything.

MARIA

It does more than you think. It's healthy.



ESTHER

I feel like I could just explode...

MARIA

Something that might help you is to write a lament.

ESTHER

A lament? What's that?

MARIA

It's like writing a letter to God--a way of sharing your feelings with God--even the bad ones. Do you remember me talking about David in the Bible?

ESTHER

Yes...he killed the giant and became King.

MARIA

Well, he's also one of the most well-known writers of a part of the Bible called Psalms. He would lament to God--tell God when he was angry, scared, frustrated, lonely.

ESTHER

Really?

MARIA

Yes. At one point, he says:  
"I see no one who is my friend. I have no safe place. No one cares for my soul."

ESTHER

David said that? That's sort of how I feel sometimes.

(beat)

So I could actually say those things to God?

MARIA

Of course. You matter to him. And how you feel matters to him--whether you're afraid or angry or sad. Some people might just create the words in their head--as a prayer or song, but since you know how to write you could even put yours down on paper.

ESTHER

Maybe I'll try it. I don't know.  
(beat, concerned)  
But you won't look at it, will you?

MARIA

Not unless you want me to. What you write down is private--just between you and God.

Music bridge.

64 AT TABLE

64

Girls are opening box, and exclaiming over what's inside. "Wow." "This is for us?" "What's in it?" "Hurry up, Elena!"

KALUA

Pencils and crayons!

DESTA

Oh, wow, look!

Esther enters.

ESTHER

What is this?

ELENA

From the package we picked up. Look at all this paper!

ESTHER

Who sent this, Auntie Naomi?

NAOMI

A friend of mine sent it as a gift for all of you.

KALUA

Can we use them?

NAOMI

Of course. How about you start with drawing what you'd like to do when you grow up?

ESTHER

But what if we don't know?

NAOMI

Just think about it. Whatever you want. Just dream.

ESTHER

(unsure)

Okay.

ELENA

(whispering)

I don't know if I can do this.

KALUA

We can use all of it? All these colors?

NAOMI

Yes. Just remember to share. You may do one picture each.

Music sting.

65

LIVING AREA - LATER

65

Maria and Naomi are talking.

MARIA

I love the pictures the girls drew today,  
Naomi. What a treat for them.

NAOMI

Yes, although now I'm not sure if it was a  
good idea.

MARIA

What, having the girls try drawing?

NAOMI

No, they loved that. I meant the dreaming  
about their future.

MARIA

Hope is so important, Naomi.

NAOMI

Hope leads to discouragement.

MARIA

But dreaming is good for the brain. It  
allows their imagination to grow. It allows  
them to see that their lives can be so  
much bigger than they are now.

NAOMI

But can they really be?

MARIA

Of course. It will be a struggle. But they  
need to know it's possible.

NAOMI

What will they do when they grow up?

MARIA

Those are things we can look for now. Just think about the talents and interests of each girl.

NAOMI

Well, Desta is the best at sewing. She could probably be a seamstress.

MARIA

That's a respectable job. And we can help her find an apprenticeship.

NAOMI

But what about Elena?

MARIA

Well, did you notice how she cared for Belia after the birth? And remember, how she was always interested in how the baby's health was?

NAOMI

So do you think she could be a midwife?

MARIA

Yes, or something in the medical field. I've actually talked with the Ngabire's about having her work in the clinic a couple afternoons a week.

NAOMI

Huh. You know I think she'd like that.

MARIA

Now Esther has a talent for gardening. It will be good for her to get a booth at the market this summer and start selling her vegetables.

NAOMI

She'll love that. Actually making money.

MARIA

Yes, it helps a person's confidence to see the results of their hard work. I could also see her being a teacher.

NAOMI

Yes. She'd be good at that, too. She's often helping the others with their studies.

MARIA

So we'll continue looking for opportunities for each of them to use their skills and hopefully find places for them to be apprentices. But what's most important right now is helping them learn to trust. For many of them, they feel so hopeless, it's hard to imagine a future that's happy and productive. They're stuck in the difficulty of right now.

NAOMI

But if they can start dreaming of a better life for themselves now, then maybe they'll start making decisions now that lead to that kind of life.

MARIA

Oh, you are wise beyond your years, Naomi.

NAOMI

(with a smile)

I'm getting there. Now if I was only wise enough to find those missing towels.

MARIA

More are missing?

NAOMI

And a sheet. You know, I'm actually wondering if some animal is taking them off the clothesline.

MARIA

That would be strange.

NAOMI

But possible. It's all I can think of. We need those towels, Maria. I'm going to figure this out.

MARIA

(amused)

I'm sure you will.

Music sting.

66

OUTSIDE IN GARDEN

66

Esther is writing lament when Naomi comes outside.

ESTHER

(writing, to self)

Hurting like...darkness...no.

(scratches out)

Like a dark hole.

Naomi approaches.

NAOMI

Hello, Esther...

ESTHER

(surprised)

Oh! Auntie Naomi!

NAOMI

Sorry to startle you. What are you working on? Writing something?

ESTHER

No...I mean, yes...but I don't want to say what it is.

NAOMI

Ah. Another mystery. Just like the towels.

ESTHER

The towels.

NAOMI

Yes. I'm going to check the clothesline to see if I can find out how they're disappearing.

ESTHER

Okay.

Naomi walks to clothesline. She hears digging.

NAOMI

Now I know I put out four sheets...and they're all here. Hm.

(beat)

What's that?

Beat.

NAOMI (CONT'D)

(softly, to self)

What...I can't believe it.

Smash cut.

69

PARKING LOT IN TOWN - EVENING

69

A man is 'returning' Sarah to Uncle--refusing to pay.

UNCLE

(bellowing)

What do you mean you're not paying?

That was the agreement!



MAN

I'm not paying for garbage! That girl is sick as a dog with fever. She's covered in a rash! Being with her I'd get a disease for sure!

UNCLE

I'll give you a discount. Half off.

MAN

I wouldn't pay a shilling for that. I'm going somewhere else.

Leaves. Uncle turns to Sarah.

UNCLE

You! Girl! Get in the truck.

SARAH

(listless)

Yes, Uncle.

Doors open and shut. Uncle starts truck. Runs rough. Bouncing over dirt roads.

UNCLE

You're a piece of garbage. Did you hear that man--wouldn't pay a shilling for you. You're not worth my time anymore, girl. I don't even want to be with you. All you do is stare out into nowhere like an idiot!

Drives for a couple beats. Pulls over on the side of the road. Turns off car. Opens door.

UNCLE (CONT'D)

That's it.

Door shuts, as he walks around.

SARAH  
(weakly)  
What?

He opens her door.

UNCLE  
You need to get out of here. You're  
wasting my time.

SARAH  
I...I...

He yanks her out. Drops her to the ground.

UNCLE  
(grunts)

SARAH  
No...no, please.

He kicks at her, grunting as he kicks harder.

SARAH (CONT'D)  
(begs)  
Please...I'll do whatever you want.

Sarah grunts in pain with each kick.

UNCLE  
(jeering)  
You deserve this.

One more big kick. She groans/screams as she rolls into ditch.

SARAH  
(moans, cries, whispering  
weakly)

Truck tires spin in dirt and drives away.

Music bridge.

End of Part 5.