

HOLDING ESTHER

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For
RiverCross-TWR

67

MARIA'S OFFICE

67

Naomi is talking to Maria.

NAOMI

She was burying the towels. Perfectly good towels!

MARIA

Kalua? But why?

NAOMI

I don't know. She didn't see me, then she ran off.

MARIA

What did you do?

NAOMI

I dug them back up. But she'll be washing them. She must've taken the others, as well. Who knows where she buried them.

MARIA

Remember what Kalua has been through, and how difficult it can be for girls who've been abused like she's been to reason.

NAOMI

But burying towels Maria?

MARIA

You know this. There's always a reason behind the behavior--

NAOMI

That is often more about their story before they came.

MARIA

Yes.

Maria stands up.

MARIA (CONT'D)

I need to get to a meeting. Just be patient--
and gentle--with Kalua.

NAOMI

Of course.

Music bridge.

68 ROOM WHERE KALUA STAYS

68

Knocks on door.

KALUA

Yes?

Naomi opens door.

NAOMI

Kalua, I think we need to talk. Have you
been taking towels from the kitchen?

KALUA

No. None.

NAOMI

You see I'm missing some--

KALUA

I didn't take them.

NAOMI

And I saw you burying towels in the back
today.

KALUA

No. That wasn't me.

NAOMI

I saw you.

KALUA

It must've been someone else.

(flustered)

I saw Esther taking a whole pile of towels yesterday. It was probably her. And...and there was a wild dog running through here the other day--

NAOMI

Through the house?

KALUA

And it had a sheet in it's mouth.

NAOMI

Kalua. I know you're lying to me. Why why are you lying to me?

KALUA

I'm not.

NAOMI

(irritated)

Kalua!

Music bridge.

70 FRONT PORCH OF HOUSE - EVENING

70

Maria is sweeping. Sound of crickets.

MARIA

Are the girls working on their schoolwork?

NAOMI

Yes. I'll check in with them in a few minutes.

MARIA

How did things go with Kalua today?

NAOMI

Oh...I'm just not very good at this, Maria.

Maria stops sweeping.

MARIA

Of course, you are. You're wonderful with the girls.

NAOMI

You say that all the time. But.. I've been here for nearly three years now. And I still losing my temper with them.

MARIA

It can be hard not to. Their behaviors are frustrating.

NAOMI

I just hate being lied to--and that's all Kalua seems capable of doing. She's lying about everything.

MARIA

You're often very patient--

NAOMI

(sadly)

But not this time. And I know that kids with this history of abuse may not understand the difference between right and wrong. And it makes sense. When somebody is doing something terrible to you at a very young age--it feels wrong, but you're the child. You don't know. And you get in trouble for not obeying--so is it your fault? Are you the bad one?

MARIA

It has to be pretty confusing for them.

NAOMI

And I know that. I've seen it. I've even spoken to other caretakers about that very thing.

MARIA

But today you forgot.

NAOMI

Yes.

(beat)

I've been working with these girls long enough to know that losing patience doesn't solve problems.

MARIA

We're learning and growing, too Naomi, just like the children. Forgive yourself. If God has so much grace for you, surely we can give ourselves a little grace, too.

NAOMI

I'll need a lot. I...just don't know if I can do this job sometimes.

MARIA

When we have a calling on our life to care for His children, we become his hands of compassion. He uses us in bigger ways than we can see. And that's more important than the money.

NAOMI

That's good--because the pay check isn't much.

MARIA

(chuckles)

You'll receive an abundant treasure in heaven, Naomi. Each of these girls in a precious gem of God's. He sees them as priceless--of immeasurable value.

NAOMI

I agree. And each of them is covered with mud. Every time a man has forced himself on them, every abuse, every slap, every cruel word spit in their face, every lie told to them that they are worthless--they each add a layer of mud, so you can't see the jewel underneath it all.

MARIA

Yes! And if we can chip away, one layer at a time, with truth and love and hope and goodness...eventually, eventually, we can uncover that precious stone for the rest of the world to see. And, most importantly, for that girl herself to see.

NAOMI

That does make me realize the importance of this job. I need to remind myself of that every day.

MARIA

We need to remind each other. We've been entrusted by God to care for his treasure--his precious girls.

NAOMI

Yes, including Kalua.

MARIA

I've made many mistakes in this work, Naomi. I still do.

(MORE)

MARIA (CONT'D)

And when we make a mistake, the only thing we can do is forgive ourselves...and try again.

Music sting.

71 KALUA'S ROOM

71

Drop scene further on, but make about bed-wetting

Naomi is at the door.

NAOMI

Kalua, we need to talk.

KALUA

What about?

Naomi sits down on bed.

NAOMI

It's wrong for you to take things that belong to others--like the towels. And it's wrong to say you didn't when you did.

KALUA

Why?

NAOMI

We respect each other's things. That shows that we care about others. You do know that I care about you, right?

KALUA

I guess.

NAOMI

And I wouldn't take things that belong to you without asking. We don't take things that aren't ours.

KALUA

Okay.

NAOMI

And it's important to tell each other the truth. What really happens, not make something up.

(beat)

You do understand?

KALUA

I think so.

NAOMI

You're usually a kind and thoughtful person, Kalua. And I was thinking...perhaps you were trying to hide the towels and sheets from me because you were using them to clean up after wetting your bed?

KALUA

(horrified her secret is out)

No! No! I would never do that!

NAOMI

I know this can be embarrassing. You need to know a lot of girls that have had similar things happen to them struggle with that. And it's okay. In fact, it's pretty common.

KALUA

It...is?

NAOMI

Yes, and you don't have to hide it. We can clean it together. It's nothing to be ashamed of. Nothing.

KALUA

Oh.

NAOMI

How about we go dig up some towels and
do some wash together tomorrow?

KALUA

But I...
(giving in)
Okay, Auntie Naomi.

Music bridge.

72 ESTHER'S ROOM - EVENING

72

Maria is checking in with Esther and Kalua as they get ready for bed.

MARIA

Are you girls ready for bed?

ESTHER/KALUA

Yes, Auntie Maria./Almost, Madam.

MARIA

And did you finish your homework?

ESTHER

Yes.

KALUA

Almost. I didn't understand some of it.

MARIA

Why don't you go ask Auntie Naomi to
help you with it?

KALUA

Okay.

She grabs papers.

MARIA

But hurry. It's bed time.

She leaves.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Esther have you been working on your lament?

ESTHER

Yes.

(beat, hesitantly)

I finished it.

MARIA

Very good.

ESTHER

I think...I'd like to share it with you. If you want to hear it.

MARIA

I'd like that very much.

She pulls out a piece of paper from a book.

ESTHER

Are you ready?

MARIA

Yes.

ESTHER

(clears throat, reading)

I am alone. I am air. Not seen, not heard.

Living in a dark hole.

All the people that made me real are gone.

Like a wispy cloud I move through life, not

feeling, not living. Numb.

You've failed me, God.

You've forgotten me like a limb fallen from a tree.

You don't care about me.

But then sometimes--I see you.

(MORE)

ESTHER (CONT'D)

In the memory of things my mother said,
in the flutter of feathers from a bird taking
flight, in the kindness of someone I know.
And I wonder, for an instant, maybe you
do care.
Maybe.
So I look towards you, sun on my face, and
I ask you to show me a little bit of hope.
Let me see that you see me.

She folds up paper.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

It's not that good.

MARIA

It's a great piece of writing Esther.. It
really shows your thoughts and feelings.

ESTHER

I liked doing it.

MARIA

The Bible tells us "We are God's
workmanship..." The word for workmanship
is actually "poem."

ESTHER

So...it's saying we're God's "poem"?

MARIA

Yes! Think about how you thought through
the words in your lament. How you used it
to show your heart and emotion. The same
is true of God--He so carefully designed
you. You're a reflection of His heart.

ESTHER

I've never thought of myself as God's
poem.

MARIA

But you are! And this poem he's written--
you--was created for a purpose. He has a
plan for you. He is going to use your pain,
and your gifts, and your desires to do
something wonderful in the world.

ESTHER

Me? I have a purpose?

MARIA

Absolutely. Your life matters so much,
Esther.

Music bridge....

73 LIVING ROOM AT MARIA'S

73

Girls are acting out a play with Naomi.

ESTHER

You should be the King, Elena.

ELENA

I was the King last time. I want to be
Queen Esther.

KALUA

But Esther's name is Esther.

ELENA

Well, then let's change it to Queen Elena.

The girls laugh.

KALUA

You always like giving orders to the
peasants anyway.

ELENA

Fetch me my water, servant!

(beat)

Okay...I'll be king.

The girls react. But it's playful and fun.

Knock on door.

NAOMI

I'll get it.

She opens door. Girls continue playing and laughing in background.

NAOMI (CONT'D)

Dr. Ngabire! What a pleasant surprise.

DR. NGABIRE

(uncomfortable)

Uh...thank you, Naomi.

NAOMI

It's kind of you to visit. Did Maria set up an appointment today? She didn't tell me, and it's her day off.

DR. NGABIRE

No. No appointments. But...I needed to speak with Esther.

NAOMI

Esther?

Esther comes to doorway. Naomi calls out to Esther.

NAOMI (CONT'D)

Esther

ESTHER

What do you need to see me for?

DR. NGABIRE

Let's go out on the front porch. Naomi,
you should come, too.

NAOMI

(uncertain)
Of course.

ESTHER

Yes, Dr. Ngabire.

They go out on porch and close door to shut out noise.

DR. NGABIRE

Esther...does this look familiar?

Shows her locket.

ESTHER

The butterfly necklace! It's my mother's!
(realizing)
Sarah was wearing it! Did you find her?

DR. NGABIRE

(serious)
Esther--

ESTHER

Even if you didn't, it would still give us a
clue as to where she might be! Where did
you find it?

DR. NGABIRE

Esther...this was found on a girl who'd...
(breath)
Who'd been killed.

NAOMI

(gasps)

ESTHER

(hushed)
What?

DR. NGABIRE
It was found on a...body.

ESTHER
Sarah's?
(disbelief/anger)
No! No I want to see her!

DR. NGABIRE
The body had already been, well, eaten by
wild animals.
(hurrying)
We don't know that it was Sarah--

ESTHER
(hollow)
But who else could it be? She's....dead.

DR. NGABIRE
We don't know.

NAOMI
It may only be a locket that looks like your
mother's.

DR. NGABIRE
Yes!

ESTHER
No...it's hers. I can tell. And....she's dead?
Sarah is dead?

Beat.

DR. NGABIRE
I'm so sorry.

NAOMI
Oh...Esther.

ESTHER

No!

(wails)

No...no...no...

Music bridge takes us up to...

74

GARDEN - AFTERNOON

74

Maria walks out to garden, where Esther sits.

MARIA

It's lovely, Esther.

ESTHER

Oh. Hello, Auntie Maria.

(sigh)

It's not a proper burial site.

MARIA

The flowers are beautiful though. And arranged with the pretty stones as you have it...Sarah would have like it, I think.

ESTHER

It will give me a place to remember her, at least.

(beat)

I buried a box with the necklace inside. It was all I had of her...

MARIA

You have her memories. Hang on to those.

ESTHER

I'm the only one left of our family. It should be Sarah who's left. She was the youngest--the most alive.

MARIA

That's not for you to decide.

ESTHER

(bitterly)

No...nothing is for me to decide.

MARIA

I know it must feel that way.

ESTHER

(growing more angry)

Because that's the way it is. I didn't choose to watch my sister get abused.

MARIA

You're right.

ESTHER

(not hearing her)

I didn't choose to touch my uncle like he made me. I hated that. I felt awful.

MARIA

Oh, sweetheart--

ESTHER

He'd tell me what to do and I had to do it, I...I...

(catching self)

But it was worse for Sarah.

MARIA

But that doesn't lessen how painful it was for you.

(beat)

Oh, thank you for telling me. I've hoped for three years that you'd open up to me.

ESTHER

Why does it matter? It would be better to just forget it. To pretend it never happened.

MARIA

But you'll never forget--not really. That pain stays locked up inside you when you don't talk about it. And it has power over you when it remains a secret. But when we talk about wrongs done against us--they lose their power over us.

ESTHER

I...I can't talk about it anymore.

MARIA

I understand. But I want you to know that what your uncle did to you, it doesn't make you who you are. God tells you who you are. And he says you are fearfully and wonderfully made.

ESTHER

(not believing it)

Mama always told me that verse.

MARIA

Your mama knew truth.

ESTHER

She thought our lives mattered to God.

(beat)

I don't believe that anymore.

MARIA

You want to know how much you matter to God? "He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will exult over you with loud singing."

ESTHER

But if you knew, Auntie Maria, I'm
so...dirty...

MARIA

God says, "When I saw you, I spread my
garment over you and covered your
dirtiness; I made my vow to you and
entered into a covenant with you, .. and
you became mine."

ESTHER

I don't feel like I belong to Him.

MARIA

Long before the creator
laid down earth's foundations He had you
in mind.

ESTHER

Then why did He leave me alone?!

MARIA

"Do not be afraid or terrified, for the LORD
your God goes with you; He will never
leave you nor forsake you."

Silence.

MARIA (CONT'D)

You are hearing the lies of the enemy,
Esther. Just like your sister was trapped by
your uncle's false words--and couldn't get
out of the truck. You are trapped, too. You
believe things about yourself--and about
God--that aren't true.

ESTHER

But I hear the words all the time.

MARIA

Then you fight them with truth. You say those verses that I just told you every day. You speak them out loud. You pull out lies--just like we pull out weeds--by speaking truth, again and again and again.

Beat

MARIA (CONT'D)

And the more you know God's word--the more you seek Him--the more you know what truth really is. And when you know the truth--you recognize the false words for what they are.

ESTHER

I don't know...

MARIA

I know those verses are hard to believe. Because you've heard the opposite for so long. We are going to say these verses every day, Esther. Because the truth needs to be louder than the lies.

Music bridge.

75

NGABIRE HOME

75

Lorraine calls family to dinner.

LORRAINE

Go ahead and set the table, Belia.
(calling)
George! Time for dinner. And can you get Lydia up from her nap?

Sounds of Belia setting table. George enters with three-year-old Lydia.

GEORGE

Already did. We've been playing in the girls' room.

LORRAINE

Ready to eat, Lydia?

LYDIA

Lid-yah. Eat.

GEORGE

(inhales)

Smells delicious, Lorraine.

LORRAINE

Thank you. Have a seat, Belia.

BELIA

Um, I'm not feeling hungry. If it's okay, I'll go to my room.

LORRAINE

(uncertain)

Okay. I'll come check on you....

Belia leaves before Lorraine can finish. Lydia babbles a bit in the background.

LORRAINE (CONT'D)

(sighs)

That's the second meal she's skipped this week. I wish she'd talk with me.

GEORGE

We knew it would be a challenge. And there's been some really good days.

LORRAINE

Yes, and some really hard days.

GEORGE

She's talking. She's asking for what she wants. She even lets me rock her sometimes, and I know that must be healing for her.

LORRAINE

Certainly she was never cared for like that when she was a child. She needs it now.

GEORGE

She's come a long way. But there will always be ups and downs. We never know what memories or doubts or fears are making their way to the surface. We can only be consistent in our love for her.

LORRAINE

Yes...I need to remember. And we're in this for the whole journey--even if it is a long one.

Music bridge.

76

MARIA'S HOUSE

76

Girls are using the art supplies.

KALUA

Hand me the green, Esther.

ESTHER

Here.

ELENA

What do you think of this?

Holds up paper.

ESTHER

What is it, Elena?

ELENA

A bicycle, of course.
(looking again, skeptical)
But maybe it looks more like a rabbit.

Maria enters.

MARIA

Ah, you have the art supplies out again?

ESTHER

Naomi said we could. If we only used one piece of paper.

MARIA

That's fine. You've finished your chores?

Chorus of "Yes, Auntie."

MARIA (CONT'D)

And your schoolwork.

Chorus of "Yes, Auntie".

KALUA

I colored the sunrise I saw this morning.
See?

MARIA

Very nice, Kalua. What are you working on, Esther?

ESTHER

I don't know yet. Do you have any ideas?

MARIA

Well, what about the story we talked about during our Bible time this morning?

ESTHER

Hagar? When she's out in the desert with her dying son?

KALUA

I liked that story. I liked that God saw her and helped her--even when she didn't think anyone cared.

ESTHER

I want to believe God's like that. I hope he sees us.

ELENA

But it had to be so painful to Hagar. To be in that place.

MARIA

But God never wastes pain. He can actually make something good and fruitful come out of it. He can use it to help others going through a similar pain.

ELENA

It's just...it's really hard to believe sometimes.

MARIA

It might seem impossible now, but I've seen it happen with girls who were terribly abused. Through God's grace, they're now aiding other girls who've been abused. God can create beauty from ashes--in all of us.

Music sting.

77 NGABIRE HOME - EVENING

77

Lorraine and George are reading, and George puts down his book.

GEORGE

Lorraine, I've been thinking.

LORRAINE

About what?

GEORGE

Belia. Over the last few years, we've been able to see more of her personality.

LORRAINE

Yes. She's come out of her shell quite a bit-
-even if she still hides at times.

GEORGE

She likes to be helpful. I wonder if perhaps she could be my assistant at the clinic.

LORRAINE

Hm. She might enjoy that. Some light cleaning, office work.

GEORGE

She could even assist me with patients.

LORRAINE

I think she's still awake. You should ask her.

Music bridge.

78

OUTSIDE

78

Esther is up in a tree picking mangos.

ESTHER

(grunts)

Are these enough mangos, Auntie Naomi?

She drops down and puts the mangos in a bucket.

NAOMI

(carrying her own load)

I suppose so for now. Thank you, Esther.

She also puts it down.

NAOMI (CONT'D)

(noticing)

Oh...look at that.

ESTHER

What is it?

NAOMI

That branch. Do you see it?

ESTHER

What?

NAOMI

Look underneath.

ESTHER

Some strange growth. Is this tree diseased?

NAOMI

No...look closer. It's a cocoon.

ESTHER

A cocoon. So there's a caterpillar inside.

NAOMI

Right. Be careful not to knock against it. We wouldn't want it to fall.

ESTHER

You want to save an ugly worm?

NAOMI

A caterpillar. Not an ugly worm. It has beauty--just like all of us have beauty. And I want to see if it becomes a butterfly.

ESTHER

(disagreeing)

Mm.

NAOMI

Think what you want, but leave it alone.
Let's finish up here.

They start packing up baskets.

Naomi begins humming the 'Mother's Song' for several measures.

ESTHER

Can you stop?

NAOMI

What, Esther? What's wrong?

Naomi's second sentence sounds filtered and distant, as we go into Esther's head for the flashback being triggered. Naomi's humming becomes Esther's mother's humming and singing of the "Mother's song".

MAMA

(from Part 1)

"Hakuna Mungu Kama Wewe....."

ESTHER

Stop...stop...stop.

Singing grows louder. (Following clips are from Part 1.)

MAMA

I need you to be strong.

ESTHER

I can't be.

NAOMI

(filtered, as though far away)

Are you okay, Esther?

MAMA

You and your sister will have each other.
Promise you'll watch over her...protect
her.

UNCLE

Sarah, come with me. There's someone
who wants to meet you.

ESTHER

(present)

No...not that. Not that.

SARAH

(screaming, in distance)

Nooo! Stop! I'll do it! I'll do whatever you
want!

UNCLE

(muffled)

You do what I tell you to do! This is all
you're good for.

SARAH

(sobbing)

Back to present.

ESTHER

(angry)

No! No!

NAOMI

Esther?

ESTHER

Get away from me!

(screaming with vehemence)

Get away from me!

NAOMI

But...

Pushes Naomi down.

Naomi falls with a grunt.

ESTHER

Don't look at me! I hate you! Get away
from me!

She runs inside and slams door.

NAOMI

(to self)

What happened?

Music bridge.

End of Part 6.