

HOLDING ESTHER

Written by

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For  
RiverCross-TWR

Maria comes outside and runs over.

MARIA  
Naomi, are you okay?

Maria helps Esther up.

NAOMI  
Just a little surprised.

MARIA  
Let me help you up.

NAOMI  
Thank you.  
Did you see Esther? Where did she go?

MARIA  
Up to her room. As quickly as I've ever  
seen her go.

NAOMI  
Oh good. She's giving herself some time to  
calm down.

MARIA  
Did you say something? Do something?

NAOMI  
Yes...and no.

MARIA  
You make so much sense, Naomi.

NAOMI  
I mean, yes, it probably was something I  
said, but it wasn't me that made her mad.

MARIA  
Ah, but you triggered something.

NAOMI

Apparently.

(sigh)

Esther's been here for years. I've experienced that kind of thing from other girls, but from her I wasn't expecting it. Not now.

MARIA

But it's impossible to say what will hit them--or when.

NAOMI

Yes, you know I remember when Tuvalu would shake uncontrollably every time we said the word milk.

MARIA

Or, yes, remember Makena? She screamed whenever she heard crickets.

NAOMI

Oh, that poor dear. This was definitely a flashback of some sort. It was like she was remembering something.

MARIA

It must have seemed like she was re-living it. Like it was happening all over again. Flashbacks are powerful Naomi--you can feel and smell and taste the same things you did back when it actually happened.

NAOMI

(sadly, shake of head)

She's been opening up more...and laughing. It's sad--now she's mad at us all over again.

MARIA

Two steps forward and one step back is still progress. Even one step forward and three steps back is progress--as long as they know they're safe going both forward and backward with you.

NAOMI

I hurt for her. You know it breaks my heart to know that she's had o much pain in her life. I just have to remind myself this isn't about me. She's not really mad at me. It's the wound.

MARIA

Exactly. Are you going to go talk to her?

NAOMI

In a little bit. I'll give her some time.

MARIA

Good idea. In the meantime, let's go in and bandage up that scrape.

Music bridge.

79      OUTSIDE - SHORT TIME LATER

79

Esther is gardening. Naomi kneels down next to her. They weed together through scene.

NAOMI

I didn't realize you'd come back out here.

ESTHER

The garden needs some weeding,  
and...and I feel better now.

NAOMI

Oh.

ESTHER

You've counted from 1 to 10 with deep breathing so many times...it really does work.

NAOMI

(with a chuckle)

Well, I'm glad.

ESTHER

I still need to think through some of those memories. But right now, I just need to work in the garden.

NAOMI

I understand.

ESTHER

It feels like I'm making a difference here. I can see things grow.

NAOMI

The flowers are beautiful. I didn't know you were planting flowers.

ESTHER

Nurse Lorraine gave them to me. I love how colorful they are.

Pause, as they continue weeding.

ESTHER (CONT'D)

I noticed you saved the branch with the cocoon on it.

NAOMI

Yes. I leaned it against the tree--just to see what happens.

ESTHER

I wouldn't give it much hope. The cocoon is pretty dry and dead-looking. We should throw it out.

NAOMI

I think we can give it more time. You never know what might happen. Transformation takes time.

ESTHER

I'd be too impatient if I were you.

NAOMI

But then you might miss out on something incredibly beautiful. Have you heard the Proverb? "Just when the caterpillar thought 'I am incapable of moving,' it became a butterfly."

ESTHER

Yes...I think I have heard that.

NAOMI

I think I see you becoming a butterfly, Esther. Wait and see.

Music bridge.

80

NGABIRE HOUSE

80

Mrs. Ngabire is trying to talk to Belia. They're washing dishes.

LORRAINE

How was dinner tonight, Belia? You didn't eat much.

BELIA

Mmm.

LORRAINE

Can you believe that it's been three years this month that you've come to be part of our family?

BELIA

Hm. Yes.

LORRAINE

I know it's hard to trust us. And I'm okay with you taking whatever time you need. But I want you to know that if you ever do want to talk, I really do want to listen. I love you, Belia. You're my daughter.

BELIA

Mmm-kay.

LORRAINE

I might understand more than you think.  
(deep breath)  
Have a seat. I think it's time I told you this.

Belia and Lorraine sit.

LORRAINE (CONT'D)

Belia, I was abused for the first ten years of my life. First by my stepfather, and then an older brother.

BELIA

Really?

LORRAINE

Yes. There were times I just wanted to die. And then I just shut my heart off. I didn't want to feel anything. I was just there--but I wasn't really there.

Beat.

LORRAINE (CONT'D)

I wonder if that's how you feel. And, if it is, I want you to know it is possible to feel alive again. To feel loved again.

(breath)

My mother eventually sent me to live with my grandmother. That was a safe place for me. At first I whined a lot and was disobedient, but she understood that those behaviors were walls I put up. To shut others out who might hurt me. But she was patient with me, and I learned somehow to trust again.

BELIA

Hm.

LORRAINE

I knew I wanted to help other people-- which is why I went to nursing school. I met your father at a clinic and...and eventually I could love him, too. That was hard. But he continued to pursue my heart with his gentleness and kindness. And, at the same time, God was healing my heart, too. So I could love--and be loved.

BELIA

You? You went through that?

LORRAINE

Yes. And I survived. I learned to trust who God says I am. And I know you can, too. Belia, I will do whatever I can to help you.

Music bridge.

81 SHED

81

Maria and Esther are putting tools away.



MARIA

Here, I'll take your hoe.

ESTHER

Auntie Maria...look.

MARIA

What?

ESTHER

The cocoon Naomi saved...on the branch.

MARIA

It's shaking. I think it will be coming out soon.

ESTHER

It stopped moving.

MARIA

You know this is the most difficult part of a butterfly's life? Breaking out of its cocoon takes all the strength it has. It probably feels like too much at times.

ESTHER

We could help it. I could--

She moves toward branch.

MARIA

No. It might seem like too much for the butterfly. But it won't be. And the strength it builds breaking out of this cocoon, will be the strength that allows it to fly.

ESTHER

But what if it can't. What if it dies?

MARIA

They're pretty tough. You might be surprised.

Music sting...

82

NGABIRE HOME

82

Lorraine and Naomi are having tea.

LORRAINE

Here you are, Naomi.

She pours tea.

NAOMI

Oh, thank you, Lorraine. Tea and biscuits are just what I needed.

LORRAINE

I'm glad you stopped by.

NAOMI

I took some girls to the clinic the other day, and noticed Belia was helping out there. I mean, how wonderful!

LORRAINE

She seems to really enjoy it.

NAOMI

Yes, she seemed quite content. You know, it's beautiful to see how she's changed since becoming part of your family I mean.

LORRAINE

It's been a difficult journey at times, but she's opened up considerably.

NAOMI

Maria and I can't believe how much she talks to us now when we see her.

LORRAINE

Yes. And Lydia...my, she's three. And full of personality. It's fun seeing the two of them play together. Belia never had a childhood where she could play with toys and be tickled and read to--so now she's enjoying all those things alongside Lydia.

NAOMI

That's wonderful. And so healing for Belia.

LORRAINE

We love them both so much. Our family feels complete now that they're here with us.

NAOMI

Where are they now?

LORRAINE

Belia carried Lydia over to the market to pick up some things. They'll be back momentarily--

Door opens.

GEORGE

Hello!

LORRAINE

George! We're in here!

George walks in.

GEORGE

Ah, Naomi. I've been meaning to stop by the house. How is Esther doing?

NAOMI

She's still grieving the loss of her sister, but she's allowing herself to feel all the feelings. She even made a little memorial of sorts for Sarah.

LORRAINE

It's only been a few weeks. The girl will need some time to heal. Such a horrible thing to happen.

GEORGE

A question, do you have room for another girl?

NAOMI

I believe so.

GEORGE

I just received word that someone from our church found a girl beaten quite badly up in the fields north of town.

LORRAINE

Oh, dear.

GEORGE

The girl says she has no place to go. No family. She's barely conscious, so it's difficult to know for sure.

LORRAINE

Mm. I wonder who hurt her. Poor girl.

GEORGE

I'm guessing she'll be in the clinic for a while, but I'll contact Maria if it seems the girl will need a place.

LORRAINE

And here Naomi thought she was only coming over for tea--not more work. We must let you take a break from your job.

NAOMI

Ok, so now you sound like Maria.

LORRAINE

Maria knows what she's talking about.

GEORGE

Yes. Are the girls out?

LORRAINE

On an errand. They'll be home soon.

GEORGE

We should all go out for ice cream tonight.

LORRAINE

They'd like that, I'm sure.

Music bridge...

83

MARIA'S HOUSE

83

Naomi and Maria are talking.

NAOMI

So I was able to say hello to Belia and Lydia before I left.

MARIA

I'm glad to hear they're doing well, but I hope you did something relaxing on your day off.

NAOMI

It was relaxing. I enjoy time with Lorraine. Oh, and did Dr. Ngabire contact you-- about another girl?

MARIA

Yes, she needs medical care first off, but we'll see after that if she needs a place to stay.

NAOMI

Do you know much about her?

MARIA

Just that she had some extensive injuries to her face and ribs. I don't even know her name--the doctor isn't allowed to tell me much. We're not her guardians yet.

NAOMI

Yes. Well, I've made up a list of items we need from the market, and Elena asked about trading chores with--  
(starts to sob)

MARIA

Naomi? Naomi! Are you okay?

NAOMI

(sniffing)

Yes...I've just been teary this whole day and I'm...I'm exhausted thinking about taking in another girl. And I feel so terrible for Esther as she still grieves Sarah, and...and all the girls. They've been through so much you know...I don't know what to do with it all.

MARIA

Lean back, Naomi. Put your feet up.

Naomi does.

NAOMI

I just. Oh my, I don't know what's wrong with me.

MARIA

You are completely exhausted. We need to look after you or you'll burn out.

NAOMI

Burn out. Is that a real thing?

MARIA

A very real thing. We can drain ourselves emotionally by hearing so many tragic stories. We end up taking the pain of the children onto ourselves. Serious burnout is called "compassion fatigue."

NAOMI

But they've gone through so much more than I have--how can I be the one crying?

MARIA

Sometimes it can happen over time--working too many hours and having so much sadness build up. Or it could be one particularly tragic event that can set it off.

NAOMI

Like what happened to Sarah?

MARIA

Exactly. Oh Naomi, you can only give so much. You need a day off. Tomorrow.

NAOMI

There's just too much...

MARIA

You have to. Spend some time in prayer, take a walk by yourself, journal, sit outside and enjoy a cup of tea, get together with some friends and laugh. And sleep. Please get lots of sleep.

NAOMI

I just feel like such a weakling. I've been here for years. I should be able to handle things you know.

MARIA

It's not a matter of being strong or weak. You're involved--and that's a great thing. But it's like a race. You can't run forever--you have to take a break. Trust me--I've had my own breakdowns.

NAOMI

You?

MARIA

Yes. One of the most important things you can do in this job is to take care of yourself. Please Naomi. You're too valuable to me--to these children. We need you. And we need you healthy.

Music bridge.

84 CLINIC

84

Dr. Ngabire is talking with Belia.

GEORGE

Ah, Belia, when your done with the patients, is there something wrong?

Belia steps out of room.



BELIA

Father...

GEORGE

Yes, dear?

BELIA

(stunned)

That girl. The one brought in today...with  
the swollen face.

GEORGE

(concerned)

Yes, you were just in with her. Is she okay?

BELIA

I'm sure...that it's Sarah. Esther's sister.  
From Maria's house.

GEORGE

Sarah? You must be mistaken. Sarah died.  
Months ago.

BELIA

No, I recognize her. She's skinnier and her  
hair is different. But it's definitely Sarah.

Music sting.

85

CLINIC

85

Esther rushes in the door. Naomi follows.

ESTHER

Is it her?! Is she really here? Nurse  
Lorraine, where is she?!

LORRAINE

Sh. Calm down, child. Your sister is resting  
now.

ESTHER

But it's her? You're sure it's her?

LORRAINE

Yes. And you can see her, but you need to be prepared. Her face is very bruised and swollen. And she's...thin, Esther. She's sick.

ESTHER

I just want to see her.

LORRAINE

Go on in to the examination room. Dr. Ngabire is in there now.

She opens door and goes inside.

ESTHER

(sobbing)

Oh, Sarah...Sarah. It's really you!

NAOMI

I can't believe it! How is she?

LORRAINE

Oh Naomi, that poor girl--I don't know all that she's been through. She has a terrible case of pneumonia, and two broken ribs.

NAOMI

Do we know who...?

LORRAINE

She hasn't said anything yet. I hope she talks to Esther.

NAOMI

But she's back. And she's alive.

LORRAINE

She's back with us, Naomi. But she's not back to who she used to be.

NAOMI

But what about the necklace?

LORRAINE

Likely it was taken from her by whoever she was working for and given to another girl...

NAOMI

Who then died.

LORRAINE

Yes.

NAOMI

I...I can't believe it....

Music bridge.

86

BACKYARD OF MARIA'S HOUSE

86

Sarah is watching Esther feed the chickens.

ESTHER

I heard the doctor telling Maria you're healing quickly. He didn't think you'd be up and around for at least a month, and here you are sitting in the backyard and it's only been two weeks!

SARAH

It still hurts.

ESTHER

Well, sure. But the doctor said with rest and--

SARAH

No. I mean it still hurts. It doesn't matter if they put bandages on and medication. It hurts deeper than that.

ESTHER

Oh Sarah...

SARAH

I don't belong here, Esther. They can sing their songs and act all nice and happy. But it doesn't change who I am.

(escalating into anger,  
screaming)

It doesn't change that I don't belong here. That I don't want to be here! Just let me go back to being who I am!

ESTHER

Take a breath, Sarah.

SARAH

Don't tell me what to do!

ESTHER

Take a deep breath and count slowly. I'll do it with you.

(beat)

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

(beat)

Do you feel better?

SARAH

Eh.

ESTHER

Do you remember the last time we fed the chickens together?

SARAH

(sullen)

No.

ESTHER

It was the last time I saw uncle take you away into the shed.

SARAH

Why are you talking about this?

ESTHER

Because for months afterward, every time I came out here to feed the chickens, I'd shake uncontrollably. Every minute of that day--of hearing you scream and cry, of running through the field, of hiding in the brush smelling uncle only a few feet away. It all came back to me.

SARAH

(quietly)

I remember it.

ESTHER

And now, you know what I think about when I feed the chickens. I think about how many eggs there will be today.

SARAH

What?

ESTHER

I mean, it's getting easier. I know it's a small thing. But to me, it's a big deal. I was so full of shame and fear and...and I hated myself when Maria first brought us here. And I hated her! And, now...I'm not happy all the time, but I feel...different.

Silence.

SARAH

I don't. It's too late for me Esther. I'm spoiled. Being abused is who I am.

ESTHER

It's not who you are.

SARAH

He said I was garbage. Not worth a shilling.

ESTHER

God says you are fearfully and wonderfully made.

SARAH

I'm used and ugly and dirty.

ESTHER

God says that he sings over you, and He rejoices over you.

SARAH

(furious)

Stop it! Go away! That's not true.

ESTHER

(quietly)

I think it's the only thing that is true.

SARAH

You're crazy.

ESTHER

(gasp)

Look...look, Sarah.  
On your shoulder!

SARAH

What? Oh!

(softening)

A butterfly.

ESTHER

Remember what Mama said when she saw  
a butterfly.

SARAH

No.

ESTHER

She said it reminded her of hope. Don't you remember?

SARAH

No.

ESTHER

Yeah, I forgot it for a while, too.

SARAH

Why are we talking like this, Esther? Why are we even here?

ESTHER

Because...because there is hope. Jesus died on the cross for our sins and took them away. And his grace is big enough to cover even the places where others have hurt us. He loves us, Sarah! Really loves us.

SARAH

(emotional)

No, I can't believe it.

ESTHER

You don't have to right now. I'm going to walk beside you. I'm going to have hope for you--like Auntie Maria and Auntie Naomi had hope for me.

SARAH

But I'm--Esther, you don't know what I've done.

ESTHER

It doesn't matter. All that matters...all  
that matters is  
a little hope just landed on your shoulder.

Mother comes up singing her song again Hakuna...., fades into music that  
takes us up to...

THE END