

Healing Hand

By

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INT. AUDITORIUM- NIGHT

All is dark, sound dominates our sight-

The orchestra tunes STRINGS, BRASS, IVORY

We hear rushing feet and a RUSH past a door

INT. AUDITORIUM HALLWAY- NIGHT

A MYSTERIOUS PUPPETEER, dressed in a black tailcoat suit enters the hallway that resembles a 1910 nickelodeon. The faceless character continues rushing through.

The tuning orchestra transforms into airy music, reminding us of an inspirational yet haunting vaudeville-esque performance.

INT. DRESSING ROOM- NIGHT

In stark emptiness, the only thing lit is a far small table and stool in the center of the dressing room. On top of the stool sits a PERFECT PORCELAIN PUPPET.

Her hair is in symmetrical ringlets and her cheek bones dusted with a soft, modest rose tint.

INT. AUDITORIUM HALLWAY- NIGHT

In the still faceless puppeteers' pocket, a pair of black gloves flop half in, half out as he continues down the long hallway.

CAL (V.O.)

While the audience sits, the actors hold their breath.

INT. DRESSING ROOM- NIGHT

Porcelain Puppet sits still as a statue as we move over her features...

CAL (V.O.)

They look in the mirror and examine.

INT. AUDITORIUM HALLWAY- NIGHT

SHOES pick up speed down the hallway...

CAL (V.O.)
Perfect hair.

INT. DRESSING ROOM- NIGHT

Continue to follow her features...

CAL (V.O.)
Perfect make up.

INT. AUDITORIUM HALLWAY- NIGHT

Hands adjust BOW TIE.

CAL (V.O.)
Soon they'll become idolized
objects of viewers imagination.
They'll be loved and hated. By the
audience or themselves?

HANDS put on gloves.

CAL (V.O.)
But wait, remember to breathe.
There's a crack.

Mysterious puppeteer reaches door to the dressing room.

INT. DRESSING ROOM- NIGHT

As the door opens, a gust of wind and speed reaches the
puppet and causes her to fall.

CRACK

The puppeteer rushes forward for the puppet.

CAL (V.O.)
There's always a crack.

He puts porcelain puppet back in her beauty chair on top of
the small table and cares for her. He cares for the puppet
like one would care for a sick lover, being ever so gentle
and admiring her beauty despite her sick appearance.

(CONTINUED)

CAL (V.O.)

Where one can hide or be even more
alive. Where the character can
shine or deepen her scars. She was
perfect. The most idolized of all.
Her broken scars were mending. In
her soft, airy skin

HANDS paint over puppet's crack on her face

CAL (V.O.)

Her swift, flowing hair

HANDS caress puppets hair

CAL (V.O.)

Her unbreakable heart

HANDS adjust puppets jacket

CAL (V.O.)

Her everlasting strength

HANDS pick up puppet and mysterious puppeteer carries her
across elaborate entrance ways, cue nickelodeon-esque
visuals. *

CAL (V.O.)

The stage is where she will never
die. Her scars will fade forever,
and only her beauty will live on...

FADE TO BLACK *

INT. STAGE-NIGHT

Mysterious puppeteer walks onto stage. Eruption of applause.

Silence.

An elaborate puppet stage-Carnival style- is set up center
stage. Orchestra plays a soft background melody like a dark,
vintage trickle. *

Puppet performance begins. Puppeteer moves the puppet across
the stage, bobbing around.

CAL (V.O.)

Her story is one for everyone to
hear...

(CONTINUED)

We move from the puppet to the puppeteer, CAL BALLARD (22ish), a performer worn from mental and emotional torment, who shields that side of his life with performance.

Cal looks down at the puppet, expressionless.

CAL (V.O.)
For everyone to smile...

We follow Cal's vision to the puppet.

CAL (V.O.)
For everyone to laugh...

Laughter erupts but it seems to be one laugh, layered. We see Cal look up and out into audience and follow his search for that one laugh into pitch-black house of the auditorium.

BLACK. The laugh subtracts and stands alone.

FADE OUT

TITLE CARD OVER BLACK

~10 years ago~

INT. BALLARD LIVING ROOM- NIGHT

A phone rings in the hospital-like home. The atmosphere is dark, empty, yet trying to be happy and composed. Everyone is presumably in their respective rooms.

The phone rings a second time. NAT BALLARD (36ish), perfectionist, controlling, and caring mother picks up before the ringing stirs the twins in the next room.

NAT
Hello?

ROB (O.S.)
Hi Nat.

ROB MARIONNE (38ish) is Nat's husband. Currently, they are on a break and living separately. He's a busy guy that has no time to support a family. The couple are on strange terms.

NAT
Rob? I didn't think you were going to call.

(CONTINUED)

ROB (O.S.)
I just wanted to check in and see
how the kids are doing?

NAT
They're doing well.

ROB (O.S.)
(BEAT)
Did everyone get home safe?

NAT
Yea, they're in Callie's room now.

ROB (O.S.)
(BEAT)
And.. what about the hospital?

NAT
The doctors said that her vitals
are low, blood sugar is veering on
stable, but if we're not careful,
things might get 'tricky'-

ROB (O.S.)
Tricky? What does they mean?

NAT
I don't know Rob! Maybe if you
came, you would understand.

ROB (O.S.)
I know, I just got caught up in the
office-

NAT
Yeah, yeah, yeah... Is that all?

ROB
Honey-

NAT
Don't call me honey. You wanted the
break, when the kids needed you.
When Callie needed you. When *I*
needed you.

ROB (O.S.)
Nat, it just wasn't working when we
were under the same roof... you
seem to be handling all of the
medical things fine! You don't *need*
me.

(CONTINUED)

NAT
(BEAT)
Okay Rob.

ROB (O.S.)
I'll try and stop by later this
week, how does that sound?

NAT
Call, before you do.

ROB (O.S.)
Okay. Sorry.. Bye.

Nat hangs up. Behind her, we see a door that is
ever-so-slightly open with CAL's eyes peering out

CLOSE

INT. CALLIE'S ROOM-NIGHT

We follow the sneaky CAL BALLARD (now 11ish), a shy and
curious pre-teen who opens up in the presence of his sister
or when performing.

Cal runs and jumps into a beautifully crafted blanket fort
crafted with streams of mismatched fabric and dimming
lights.

The fort sits on top of CALLIE BALLARD's (also 11ish)
home-hospital bed.

Callie is the opposite of her twin brother. She is mature,
independent, strong, and outspoken, taking life as it is and
making the most of what she's got.

Callie's room is full of machines, stuffed animals, a
collection of handmade cards pasted on one wall. One corner
is "art corner" with a treasure chest, an aisle, paint,
brushes.

Twins are whispering underneath lantern-lit blanket fort.

INT. BLANKET FORT-NIGHT

Cal holds back tears and is anxious about what he overheard.
He wishes he never heard what Nat said about Callie
and possible "trickiness."

Callie, on the on-the-other-hand, awaits any news good or
bad with feverish thirst.

(CONTINUED)

CALLIE
Was that dad?

CAL
Yup!

CALLIE
What were they talking about?

CAL
(BEAT)
What the doctors said and then mom
started screaming a bit..

CALLIE
Hah. Figures. Well? What'd they
say?

CAL
Uh- I don't know.

CALLIE
Come on Cal! Tell me. I'm not
afraid.

Cal squirms around, uncomfortable. He reaches for something underneath Callie's bed. He pulls up two puppets: a boy and a girl.

CAL
(through boy puppet)
I'm scared, Maybell.

CAL
(through girl puppet)
Why you gotta be scared, Ronnie?

CAL
(through boy puppet)
The evil flying anteaters could
snatch you up and tear you to
pieces.

Cal pauses and looks up from his puppets at Callie. She has her arms crossed and smirks, semi-encouraging Cal's performance.

CAL
(through boy puppet)
We just haven't completed every
adventure that planet Dionzia has
to offer. There are the towers of
Adolencia and the sparkling rivers
of Younico-

(CONTINUED)

Callie mid-chuckle steals the girl puppet from Cal's loose grasp. While taking over, Callie moves Maybell all over Cal, playing with his arms, cheeks, hair, etc. *

CALLIE
 (through girl puppet)
 But we can have that Ronnie...
 There's a secret in our family..
 It's magic. *

Cal, huddled in a tight, introverted hunch, looks up through teary eyes. Callie places Maybell's hand on the edge of Cal's lips, giving him a quivering smile. *

CALLIE
 (through girl puppet)
 I'm always going to be here because
 once that anteater picks me up,
 I'll pick out his eyes like Foxes
 did to the Basilisk. And I'll cure
 any wound he might've caused
 you.. Except I don't use tears, I
 use kisses.. So brace yourself for
 a whole lot of hickeys! *

Callie attacks Cal with Maybell's kisses and tickles. The twins erupt in a giggling fit. *

FADE TO BLACK

SERIES OF SHOTS: CALLIE'S DEATH

Sound dominates these series of shots while the visuals are blurred. *

(1) FLASHBACK: INT. CALLIE'S ROOM- DAY *

CAL'S EYE LIDS flutter, remain closed *

Red and blue lights blink across his face *

(2) INT. DRESSING ROOM- NIGHT *

A flash of the porcelain doll sitting on the stool.

(3) FLASHFORWARD: EXT. FUNERAL GROUNDS- DAY *

Dust and wind whirls in between the hushed green grass and the dark audience members. All stand, hunched, in front of a casket.

We blink with Cal's eyes. He watches the casket on the ground

PASTOR

We are gathered here today.

(4) FLASHBACK: INT. CALLIE'S ROOM- DAY *

Cal looks around the bedroom. He is being carried from Callie's bed. He reaches to look back at where Callie lies. *

PASTOR (V.O.)

For the loss of a loved one, for the loss of a friend.

(5) FLASHFORWARD: INT. FUNERAL HOME- DAY *

Cal overlooks the funeral procession below from a high window. Now the casket is in the ground and covered. His mother holds Cal, failing to loosen her embrace.

PASTOR(O.S.)

Callie was a gift. She put smiles on those around her, even when she was the one in pain.

(6) FLASHBACK: INT. CALLIE'S ROOM- DAY *

We see what Cal sees: Doctors rush to the bed where Callie lies

DOCTOR SEAMER

CLEAR!

Machine causes a spasm through Callie's body.

PASTOR (V.O.)

She was a fighter. Always choosing life and adventure over negativity.

(7) INT. DRESSING ROOM- NIGHT *

Slow motion: Porcelain doll begins to fall from the stool

(8) FLASHFORWARD: EXT. FUNERAL GROUNDS- DAY *

Cal with an empty, emaciated gaze, looks towards his mother *

PASTOR
A role model. A lending hand.

(9) FLASHBACK: INT. CALLIE'S ROOM- DAY *

Nat is in the corner on the phone with Rob. She is both *
angered and numb. She crumbles to the ground, alone. *

Cal stares at his mother with no response. *

PASTOR (V.O.)
The palm, raising each and every
one of us to a higher, happier life
than ever imagined.

(10) INT. DRESSING ROOM- NIGHT *

Slow motion and silent: the Porcelain doll crashes on the
floor.

(11) FLASHFORWARD: EXT. FUNERAL GROUNDS- DAY *

Cal races towards the casket, away from the crash

(12) FLASHBACK: INT. CALLIE'S ROOM- DAY *

Cal races towards his sister's bed, screaming.

Nat pulls him in.

NAT
It's going to be okay. Shh. Shh.
Breathe.

FADE TO BLACK

(13) BLACK

NAT (O.S.)
Breathe.

INT. BATHROOM- DAY

Cal is holding his breath underwater with his eyes closed. There is a faint knocking in the background. He breathes in as he comes up and hears the more vibrant knocking.

NAT(O.S.)
Cal? Are you ready? We don't want to be late to Doctor- err- Doctor Allen's.

Cal dips back into the water to avoid his mother.

NAT (O.S.)
You have to try, Cal. He's been recommended by everyone. By Aunt Flora, Doctor Seamer, even Jim said he was good!

INT. HALLWAY TO BATHROOM- DAY

We see Nat knock with more power. She has greyed and wrinkled more rapidly in these past two years with the stress and sadness of her daughter's death and the effects it has had on the Ballard family.

NAT
CALEB BALLARD! I'm paying a lot of money for this, it would be unfair to me, to Allen, and to you. It's been 2 years. Come out!

Nat steps back and glances at her watch. She knocks again.

NAT
Cal, I need to get to work and your father has *actually* managed to show.

ROB MARIONNE, still busy, unconnected with his family and now an almost ex-husband, walks up the stairs, and stops at the edge.

ROB
Way to give me an entrance! I think Cal can figure it out on his own, he's a smart kid.

(CONTINUED)

NAT

Kid? He's almost an adult. *

ROB

Maybe he's tired.

NAT

What are you talking about? All he does is sleep and space out.

ROB

You've tried him with 10 different therapists like a girl tries on t-shirts. Give Cal a break. Give everyone a break, it's exhausting. Even to watch.

NAT

7 actually. 7 therapists. And who are you to comment? You barely help. *

Cal comes out, dressed in flannel and with his hair uncombed. *

NAT

Finally. Honey, your hair. Couldn't you *try* to be presentable? Let me just.. *

Nat licks her hand and tries to fix Cal's hair. *

CAL

Mom?! *

Rob watches and laughs, Cal rushes past them both. *

Rob and Nat stand awkwardly. Rob gives Nat a forced wave and leaves. *

EXT. BALLARD HOUSE- LATE AFTERNOON *

As Cal exits the car, Rob leans over to Cal's now empty seat. *

ROB

Hey, kid. *

Cal turns around. *

(CONTINUED)

ROB
(BEAT)
I.. I.. Sorry

CAL
It's fine.

ROB
I couldv'e been there, but-

CAL
Dad. It's fine.

ROB
Okay. Okay. Well tell your mother..
Tell her.. Tell Nat-

CAL
What?

ROB
Nevermind.

CAL
Okay. Bye.

ROB
Wait! Cal.. You're a good kid.
You'll be okay.

Cal stands awkwardly, nods, and leaves. Rob drives away.

INT. BALLARD ENTRANCE- LATE AFTERNOON

Cal enters. Nat, by the window, was watching Rob and Cal's conversation.

NAT
See that wasn't too bad, was it?
Was Doctor Allen nice? Did your
father say anything?

Cal hunches more into himself, giving his mother the cold shoulder, and walks away.

NAT
Come on, Cal! What else can I do?

She runs to catch up

INT. LIVING ROOM- EARLY MORNING *

The house holds a negative air. Something is off. Of the pile of mail, we see a large envelope. It is divorce papers sent by Rob. *

Nat picks them up. Shocked by its timing, she brings them to the dining room. *

INT. DINING ROOM- NEW DAY *

We watch as Cal watches. *

Nat is on the phone with her lawyer, she drowns in paperwork. *

We linger on Nat and see her crumbling inside with fingers at temples. *

Cal stands awkwardly with no power to heal her heartbreak.

INT. LIVING ROOM- NEW DAY *

The house is visibly disheveled and has been untouched for a week. The divorce is filed. *

Nat lays on the couch with ratty hair, surrounded by tissues, and curled under a blanket, she rereads the copied divorce file. She looks like a lost little girl, her cheeks more sunken in than before. *

She blows her nose, still staring at the window where she last saw Rob. *

Cal comes down the stairs and approaches the kitchen entrance.

NAT

Cal. Cal, do you want something to eat? I can make it for you.

CAL

I can get it, don't worry.

NAT

No, no, I'll do it.

CAL

Are you sure?

(CONTINUED)

NAT
I'm making breakfast and you're
going to love it.

INT. KITCHEN- DAY

Nat proceeds to make a lavish meal. She puts all the energy that she wasted on the couch that week into the meal.

Flour FLIES *

Eggs CRACK *

Water SPLASH *

Nat smiles *

SPRINKLE of nuts and dried fruit *

A rhythm ensues in her cooking *

SIZZLING bacon and eggs *

She chops up FRUIT SALAD *

SQWEEZES out some OJ *

Puts something in the OVEN *

INT. DINING ROOM- DAY

Cal sits at the table in front of a beautiful array of flowers, fresh-squeezed oj, fruit salad, an array of cheeses, scrambled eggs, and bacon. *

Nat brings out the final dish, her famous raspberry-nut scones, and serves them both. *

NAT
Dig in!

Cal peers at his mother and begins. She watches him, and doesn't touch her food. *

NAT
So, what did you do today?

CAL
Not much..

(CONTINUED)

NAT
Did you go to school?

CAL
No..

NAT
Okay... Did you go to Doctor Allen?

CAL
No..

Nat tries to keep a composed face.

NAT
How am I supposed to be here for
you if you won't let me?

CAL
Mom. Not now.

NAT
Then when Cal?

*

CAL
I don't know.. just not now.

NAT
What happened to the old Cal? You
and your sister were perfect
together. So talented. Your puppets
were beautiful and her paintings..
You were so ambitious, wanting to
explore the world together, real
and imaginary. Where's that Cal?

CAL
Mom.

NAT
Fine.

Nat takes her untouched plate and throws the food in the
compost. Cal watches, bewildered.

INT. BALLARD HOME

*

With dust accumulating on the walls, heaps of untouched
trash, and dirty plates piling in the kitchen, another "off"
week has gone by in the Ballard home.

*

*

*

(CONTINUED)

Nat is disintegrating. Cal has been watching her and grown more observant and concerned. He doesn't know how to show his concern...

INTERCUT between Nat disintegrating and Cal making puppet:

INT. HALLWAY UPSTAIRS- NEW DAY

Cal, concerned, walks in the hallway. Nat is crouching outside of Callie's old room.

INT. CAL'S ROOM

We move behind Cal's desk to reveal him hard at work on a naked, bald PORCELAIN PUPPET.

There is passion and carefulness in his paint strokes, you can tell he's missed it.

INT. HALLWAY UPSTAIRS

Nat cries outside of Callie's old door in a ball.

CAL (V.O.)
An empty stage can draw the most attention.

INT. CAL'S ROOM

Cal still works on the porcelain puppet. Now brushing a head of hair.

INT. HALLWAY UPSTAIRS

Cal walks closer to her. The doorbell rings. Nat perks up, wipes away her emotions and crosses past Cal to the door.

CAL (V.O.)
There is sadness, there is longing,
there's an unheard scream.

INT. DOWNSTAIRS PASSAGEWAY- NEW DAY- LATE AFTERNOON

Nat enters the house in business attire. She's a walking corpse. Cal watches numbly, stricken with fear.

(CONTINUED)

CAL (V.O.)

Characters reach a point where they
overpower the storyteller.

INT. CAL'S ROOM

Cal holds a finished porcelain puppet. With flowing hair and
matching clothes, we do not see her face. Just a glimmering
light in Cal's eyes. *

CAL (V.O.)

And the puppet takes over their
strings. *

INT. DINING ROOM- NIGHT

Nat and Cal have their one-sided meal of awkwardness and
helplessness.

CAL (V.O.)

Control is sought out for and
control becomes their worst enemy.

The meal is over, Nat leaves rapidly. Cal walks fluidly
towards his sister's untouched room.

INTERCUT ends *

INT. CALLIE'S ROOM- NIGHT

The room lacks the machines and liveliness it had when
Callie was alive. What remains is her artwork, the get-well
cards, and miscellaneous items. *

Cal walks about, becoming both enamored with each piece of
her soul and struck with melancholy.

Cal walks up to Callie's aisle. He tickles the strokes of
her most recent painting with his fingertips, longing for
something to hold his hand. *

CAL (V.O.)

Sometimes, confronting the enemy is
where the character can prevail.
Where the stage can open again and
reveal a new act, a new segment of
the character's life. One better
than the first.

(CONTINUED)

Cal flips the pieces of art clasped to the aisle from flowers to animals to a portrait of Cal and Callie, they are painted as one. Abstract, yet real and together forever. *

We follow the brushstrokes and linger on the eyes. Cal's eyes fill with memory.

We hear someone throwing up in the next room.

Cal runs towards the noise, thinking it's Callie calling for help.

INT. HALLWAY TO BATHROOM- NIGHT

The door to the bathroom emits a self-hurting poison, dark and wary of help. *

Cal knocks softly on the door.

No answer.

CAL
Mom? Are you okay?

Cal knocks a bit more rapidly and urgently.

CAL
Mom?

Squat.

He knocks with more force, starting to get concerned.

Nothing.

Cal bangs against the door with his shoulder. *

CAL
Mom?!

Running start- WHAM.

CAL
MOM?!?

Running start again- BAM. The door swings open.

INT. BATHROOM- NIGHT

Nat is hunched over the toilet, unresponsive and frail. Vomit is all over her fingers, shirt, and face.

Cal cups his mom's face, slaps it a little.

CAL

Mom?! Talk to me. Talk to me!

He tries cupping water in his hand and splashing it over her face.

Cal's face starts to blur, blinking with red ambulance lights.

FADE OUT

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM- DAY

Covered in tubes and surrounded by monitors of all shapes and sizes, a sleeping Nat is in the center of the hospital bed with a sleepless Cal sitting in a chair next to her. His arms are specked with paint and crossed on top of the bed, by her lap.

Nat stirs, bewildered. Cal turns towards his mom.

NAT

Cal?

CAL

Yeah?

NAT

Thank you.

CAL

You're safe here. Hold on.. I have something to show you.

Cal reaches for something underneath the bed. Nat analyzes her son, seeing that something has changed.

Cal reveals the new porcelain puppet of Callie (she's the same porcelain puppet from the beginning). Nat smiles.

*
*

NAT

Cal, it's..

Nat caresses Callie's puppet like a child. She opens her arms, ever so slightly.

(CONTINUED)

CAL

Wanna hold her? She's still drying
a bit by the eyes.

Nat holds Callie's puppet and strokes back her hair. *

NAT

She's perfect.. I miss her. *

CAL

I know. Me too. She'll always be
here though.

NAT

She will.

The two lean in, admiring the art and beauty of the
porcelain puppet, the living Callie.

FADE OUT. *

INT. AUDITORIUM- PRESENTDAY- NIGHT *

Cal (back to 22ish) stares into the dark, empty audience. He
searches. *

We follow his gaze to find his mother (now 47ish). She is
the only one lit in the center of nothingness. *

A TEAR rolls down Nat's cheek. *

A tear is halfway down Cal's. *

Cal looks down at his bowing porcelain puppet. They are in
the same physical position. *

Cal and Puppet move simultaneously: *

Puppet stands straight and reaches for Nat and beyond. *

Applause. *

THE END