

CAMBION

by

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TEASER

EXT. MANCHESTER - COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

A goat's head lies in the road, split in two, matter seeping down its face. The body lies nearby, a strange symbol painted on its side.

Just ahead, a red car lies smashed and steaming. Flames ERUPT from the engine-

INT. MANCHESTER - ADAMS-BLAKE HOME - NIGHT - CONT.

A dimly-lit landing. Framed photos adorn the walls.

One photo: two couples in the countryside. LOUIS ADAMS (40, Irish; bright yet cautious) and LILIAN BLAKE (40, Irish; focused and confident), flanked by ARTHUR & DARA GRESS (30s, red-haired). Dara holds her pregnant belly, smiling oddly.

Another photo: Louis, Lilian and CAITLYN (7). A simple happy family portrait.

INT. MAIN BEDROOM - NIGHT

Louis and Lilian lie sleeping. A door EASES OPEN. FOOTSTEPS. A shadow crosses the bed. The couple stir, FLINCHING awake at-
Caitlyn, staring back.

LILIAN
Caitlyn? What are you doing up?

CAITLYN
I don't feel well.

LOUIS
Oh dear. When did that start?

CAITLYN
When the man came in my room.

INT. CHILD'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Louis peers under the pink-white bed...nothing. He checks the snow-white wardrobe...still nothing.

CREAKING. Louis freezes, glancing at the cabinets. A pretty doll's house teeters on the edge.

INT. BATHROOM - NIGHT

Caitlyn watches Lilian unscrew a bottle of sleep aid-

LILIAN
Take this. It'll help you sleep.

BANG! BEAT. Lilian takes scissors from the drawer.

LILIAN (CONT'D)
If you hear shouting, lock the
door.

She treads out. Caitlyn remains, staring at the bottle.

INT. CHILD'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lilian creeps in. A hunched form looms by the bed. She grips the scissors, and-

Louis looks up, kneeling at the dented doll house before him. Lilian relaxes.

LOUIS
I'll fix it. Promise.

FOOTSTEPS. Louis replaces the doll house, hiding the damage, just as Caitlyn treads in.

LILIAN
There's nothing here, sweetheart.

CAITLYN
He's not there. He's at the window.

Lilian tenses. Louis edges to the curtains, grips...and PULLS-
Darkness. Nothing else.

LOUIS
Nothing there now.

CAITLYN
But I saw him. He said I was
special. He wanted to give me a
gift. A magic drink. And-

LILIAN
Caitlyn? It's late. Now come on,
back to bed.

Caitlyn reluctantly climbs back in, COUGHING-

INT. LANDING - NIGHT

Caitlyn treads back from the bathroom, sleep aid in hand. The man's shadow SEEPS over her, filling the landing.

CAITLYN
Can you open it for me please?

INT. ADAMS-BLAKE HOME - MAIN BEDROOM - DAY - CONT.

Louis stirs, unnerved.

INT. LANDING - DAY

Louis paces to Caitlyn's door, WHISPERING-

LOUIS
Caitlyn? Are you awake?

He pushes the door. A SOFT CLANK. He stares down at-
The sleep aid bottle. Empty.

Louis blanches. He rushes in-

LOUIS (CONT'D)
Caitlyn? Caitlyn, can you hear me?!
Caitlyn?!

A shadow crosses the landing, resting on a photo of Arthur and Dara. In the dim light, their smiles don't seem real.

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FLASHBACK TO:

EXT. MANCHESTER - COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

CAMERA FOOTAGE:

Sunlight GLARES through blue sky. FOOTSTEPS pace the edge of a shimmering lake, reflecting two figures: Arthur and Dara.

ARTHUR (O.S.)
Where's Mummy and Daddy? Where's
Mummy and Daddy?

Arthur SWIVELS his camera, reaching a picnic blanket, where-
Louis and Lilian lie relaxing.

ARTHUR (O.S.) (CONT'D)
There's Mummy and Daddy!

Lilian LAUGHS, waving. Louis hides his face. Lilian waves his
arm for him. He manages a smirk.

Dara steps into frame to lounge between them, pregnant belly
swathed in white.

ARTHUR (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Now join hands for prosperity.

Louis and Lilian jokily join hands. Dara smiles oddly.

PRESENT:

INT. MANCHESTER - ADAMS-BLAKE HOME - BATHROOM - DAY

Louis BREAKS the surface of a still bath, GASPING IN PAIN.
His beard is flecked with grey, eyes dark with circles. A
skin graft on his left rib. He glares between his legs.

LOUIS
Blight you. Fucking blight you.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY - CONT.

Louis BOILS the kettle, reading a note left on the side-

INSERT: 'Good luck with the scan. Love Lil xxxxxxxx'.

He tenses, glancing out the window to the garden...he stares at a dented red car over the fence. Like he's seen it before.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Louis tears open the post, pulling out a fostering network brochure. He peers around...and slips it under the couch-

SMACK! A frame falls from the mantelpiece: a photo of Arthur and Dara. Louis replaces it, right next to one of Caitlyn.

LOUIS

Where are you now, eh?

A shadow SWEEPS the mantelpiece. He doesn't notice.

EXT. ADAMS-BLAKE HOME - FRONT DRIVE - DAY

Louis reverses out the drive. Next-door, an ESTATE AGENT pastes SOLD on a For Sale sign. They wave, smiling oddly.

INT. MANCHESTER - HOSPITAL - ULTRASOUND ROOM - DAY

Louis lies prone, lower half hidden under a privacy sheet.

A RADIOLOGIST draws a syringe. Louis GRIPS the bed hard.

INT. HOSPITAL - UROLOGIST'S OFFICE - DAY

A greying UROLOGIST displays Louis' ultrasound-

UROLOGIST

No scar tissue. No blood vessel damage. No STIs. And the aprostadil only made you slightly erect.

LOUIS

No surprises there.

The doctor stares at him.

LOUIS (CONT'D)

I'm intersex?

The doctor shifts back in his seat, pouring over notes.

UROLOGIST

Yes. Stage 3 phalloplasty: skin graft from left chest.

(MORE)

UROLOGIST (CONT'D)
Urethral lengthening. Nerve hook-
up. But no erectile implant?

LOUIS
Didn't think I'd need it.

UROLOGIST
Huh. You said you get this phantom
pain when you're intimate?

LOUIS
Not in the traditional sense. We
usually just hold each other. But
when she touches me now, it hurts.
So we've stopped. Just for a while.

UROLOGIST
Six months is more than a while.

LOUIS
I'm patient.

UROLOGIST
Right. And this all started after
your daughter-?

LOUIS
Yep! Yeah. So what do you reckon?

The doctor folds his hands-

UROLOGIST
Have you tried counselling before?

Louis' jaw tightens.

LOUIS
It's finding time y'know?

UROLOGIST
Well the option's always there.

LOUIS
Right. Good. All good. Thank you.

He makes for the door-

UROLOGIST
One last thing. Your surgical
history goes back to 1993. There's
nothing else before then?

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. MANCHESTER - HOSPITAL - PAEDIATRICS - DAY

As Louis remakes Cubicle 7, REBECCA (7) treads by, flanked by her PARENTS. Her bandaged arm cradles a soft toy goat.

LOUIS
Hey Rebecca. How was the X-ray,
sweetheart?

REBECCA
It was OK. Not too scary.

LOUIS
What did I tell ya? Half my height
and braver than I am! In fact, I
reckon you deserve one of these.

Louis gives Rebecca a WELL DONE sticker. She peers at him-

REBECCA
Have you been crying?

LOUIS
Dusty sheets, that's all.

Rebecca hugs her goat toy...and hands it over. Louis stares stunned.

LOUIS (CONT'D)
I can't take this Bec, he's yours!

REBECCA
He's yours now. He'll make you
happy.

The parents smile oddly, ushering her away. Louis stares after them. Just as-

A hand GRIPS his shoulder. He FLINCHES, turning to face-

A grinning DOMINIC SHAWN (50s, Social Services Manager; scraggly ginger beard, creased suit; over-friendly).

DOMINIC
You hiding from me, mate?

LOUIS
Dom! How you doing pal? Not waiting
to be seen, are you?

DOMINIC
No no. Safeguarding flagged a case.
Apparently Daddy's 'rights' are
worth more than a protection order.

(MORE)

DOMINIC (CONT'D)

But they've left me in the lurch,
so I thought I'd track you down,
kill some time?

LOUIS

I would pal, if we weren't swamped.

DOMINIC

Right right, silly me. How are you
anyway? How's Lilian?

LOUIS

Getting on. Best we can really.

DOMINIC

Of course. It's hard, isn't it?
Caitlyn was a lovely girl. Lucky.

Louis wilts, face tight with guilt. Dominic's phone RINGS-

DOMINIC (CONT'D)

Ah, that'll be them. I won't keep
you then. But we'll get together
soon yeah? Once the timing's right.
Take it easy mate!

He strides off, an odd spring in his step.

INT. HOSPITAL - MEETING ROOM - DAY

A circle of bored staff, Louis perched at the edge. A nasally
SPEAKER leads a session-

SPEAKER

Fundamentally, how can we grieve if
we don't give ourselves permission?
By restricting permission, we give
ourselves over to routine, in ways
we may not realise are harming us
until it's too late.

Louis stares wearily at the floor-

Caitlyn's body lies at his feet, staring back.

INT. MANCHESTER - PRIMARY SCHOOL - CLASSROOM - DAY

Bright colours, whiteboard. CHILDREN perch at tables with
paper, pens and paints.

At the back, Lilian is distracted by her phone, scrolling
through a Sexual Dysfunction Support group chat.

At the front: FRANCES 'FRAN' MOLOCH (50s, Irish; homely, spirited, keeps your secrets close).

FRAN

Right then lovelies: Fun Friday.
I want you to draw yourselves as
your favourite animal. What would
you change if you could? Would you
have a wolf's eyes to see in the
dark? Swap your tongue with a scary
snake's? Go as wild as you like,
let's see the best version of you.

KNOCKING. Lilian JERKS to attention, as-

Rebecca treads in, uniform rumped under her bandaged arm.

FRAN (CONT'D)

Rebecca! Good to see you back,
lovie. And just in time to join in!

Some kids GIGGLE. Rebecca WILTS. Lilian watches her fondly.

LATER

Lilian paces up and down, checking artwork. Rebecca has drawn
an androgynous lady with silvery hair, feathers and horns, on
a hill over the sea.

LILIAN

Wow! What animal's that Bec?

REBECCA

Couldn't decide cat, bird or cow,
so I did all of them.

LILIAN

A hybrid? Well that's a beautiful-

SMASH! The class YELP. Lilian hurries to the window, peering
out cracked glass at a RED-HOODED FIGURE running away.

LILIAN (CONT'D)

Protestor.

Fran ushers the class to the door-

FRAN

OK lovelies, all line up please!
Extra lunchtime today, but you must
stay inside.

EXT. PRIMARY SCHOOL - PLAYGROUND - DAY

Lilian and Fran edge outside to the cracked window. A brick lies beneath, message painted in red: 'LET KIDS BE KIDS'.

LILIAN

Makes sense. Can't hate outside the grounds so they chuck it instead.

FRAN

I can't understand it. Pulling kids out of class; death threats on the forums; and now this! We clarified the curriculum enough times, why do they keep fighting us on it?

LILIAN

Because some people like fighting more than listening.

A POLICE CAR pulls up outside. Lilian tenses.

INT. PRIMARY SCHOOL - FOYER - DAY

Lilian hovers outside the headmaster's office, watching like a hawk as Fran liaises with PC COOPER (30s).

PC COOPER

We should be able to track them across the area. In the meantime, carry on as normal and call in any new incidents if they occur.

FRAN

Thank you. I'll let the headmaster know when he's back.

Lilian edges away, calling Louis. It goes to voicemail-

LILIAN

Hi Lou. Just checking all's OK your end. I've got Simon's gift sorted for tonight, Nina said get there for seven? We've got Fran's group before then, usual start. Hope to see you there this time. Love you.

A shadow SWEEPS the foyer. Lilian blinks, peering confused through the glass doors to the playground-

In the distance, the dented red car idles.

INT. MANCHESTER - CHURCH HALL - DAY

Fran leads a diverse SUPPORT GROUP: old and young, all genders. Lilian joins them. Louis is nowhere to be seen.

All listen to MALIHA (20s, Nigerian), speaking carefully-

MALIHA

It's been a long time. Not all days have been good. I still have the pain. I still have the dreams. I still see him standing over me, telling me the cut is good, and the hurt is good, and it will make me good and clean and pure for Him. And my mother over me, stroking and shushing. Because she doesn't know the pain anymore.

Maliha blinks away tears. The circle listen on, unwavering.

MALIHA (CONT'D)

But they are only dreams. My room is safe now. And my home. And my body. And I have my little girl. Every time I look at her, a light fills me. She is innocent, and that is how she will stay. The cut will never be put on her. Never. I know now I can make that choice.

The circle smile and nod encouragingly.

FRAN

Thank you Maliha. That's exactly why we're here. Not just to share our pain, but protect and heal the ones who take our place and lead on when we're gone. But we can only do that when we've healed ourselves.

Lilian fidgets, glancing at the empty chair beside her.

EXT. MANCHESTER - ADAMS-BLAKE HOME - STREET - DAY

Fran drops Lilian at home.

FRAN

Same time next week? Maybe get Louis along if we're lucky?

LILIAN

Maybe. See how we do.

FRAN

Are you sure you're alright?

LILIAN

Yeah. It's just...are we doing enough? To keep the kids safe? What happens when they get home?

FRAN

Children are sponges: they soak up everything, good and bad. So it's up to us to give the good, right?

LILIAN

Right. Sorry, I'm being silly.

FRAN

Never. If you two need anything, just call. I'll lend an ear.

LILIAN

Thanks Fran. I think we can cope.

Fran smiles goodbye, DRIVING off, just as Louis PULLS UP outside. He gets out exhausted.

LILIAN (CONT'D)

Hey stranger. Thought you were coming straight home?

LOUIS

I'd hate myself just sitting there.

LILIAN

The group are asking after you. It's not the same without you cooking the treats.

LOUIS

They'll live. Your day alright?

LILIAN

Quiet enough. Exam OK? Tender?

LOUIS

Tell you later. Look what I got.

He reaches in his satchel, handing her the soft toy goat.

LILIAN

Aww. What's this for?

LOUIS

Saw one of your kids before her X-ray. Rebecca? She gave me this. So I'd be happy.

Lilian pecks Louis on the cheek with the toy.

LILIAN

You're an angel.

She spots the SOLD sign next-door.

LILIAN (CONT'D)

Christ, it's happening.

LOUIS

Hey, they might be nice? Hopefully quieter than last time.

LILIAN

Don't know if you could top last time. The shit in their lounge.

INT. MANCHESTER - ADAMS-BLAKE HOME - NIGHT - CONT.

In the hall: Lilian fixes her hair in the mirror. Louis enters in smart shirt and jeans, gift bag in hand.

LOUIS

Got the gift. Hope he likes them.

LILIAN

Course he will, he's too sensible. If I was 16 again I'd get hammered.

LOUIS

Yeah well, blame his birth-mum for that.

LILIAN

At least Nina doesn't overdo it. Stays the right side of merry.

LOUIS

She just called actually. She said Dad's coming.

Lilian pauses, fingers caught in hair.

LILIAN

Right. OK. No problem.

LOUIS
What if he says something?

LILIAN
No skin off my nose what he says.
You know I don't buy the 'Lord
looking down on me' shit.

LOUIS
You didn't grow up with Him hanging
over you.

LILIAN
Lucky me eh? Look, if Barney runs
his mouth, just breathe. Let it
wash over like a soothing passive-
aggressive wave. OK?

She reaches for his shoulder...then stops herself.

LOUIS
You look lovely, y'know.

LILIAN
Shut up you, I feel bare.

LOUIS
Necklace or something? You haven't
the blue cross in a while?

LILIAN
It was Caitlyn's.

BEAT.

LOUIS
Is it still in the playroom?

LILIAN
In the little box. I'll grab it-

LOUIS
It's alright. I'll go.

He treads upstairs. Lilian bites her lip.

INT. PLAYROOM - NIGHT

Louis runs Caitlyn's necklace through his fingers. He blinks
back tears, gazing around at untouched toys, costumes and
furniture. He turns to leave, flicking off the light-

TAP TAP TAP. Louis freezes. He flicks the light on...nothing.

He flicks it off, shutting the door behind him.

EXT. MANCHESTER - ADAMS-BLAKE HOME - STREET - NIGHT

Louis and Lilian head up the road.

Headlights FLICKER behind them. It's the red car, IDLING toward the house.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. MANCHESTER - NINA'S HOME - NIGHT - CONT.

DOORBELL. The door opens to Louis and Lilian, smiling at NINA ADAMS (40s; Irish; informed yet cautious Ofsted regulator; a trans woman, fully transitioned).

NINA
What are you selling?

LILIAN
We bear gifts. Nothing illegal.

NINA
Right answer.

The couple shuffle in, Lilian hugging Nina first.

LILIAN
How you been, love?

NINA
Knackered as usual. But home access is live, so I can finally do briefs in peace. Where's my hug Lou?

She envelops him tenderly. Louis returns it awkwardly.

LILIAN
Where's the birthday boy?

NINA
Fixing his collar. Wants to look his best now he's a 'man'.

LILIAN
Well he's a good-looking lad, ain't he Lou?

LOUIS
Yeah. Pretty boy. Speaking of-

SIMON paces shyly downstairs (just 16; Mancunian, boyishly handsome, not used to attention).

NINA
Oh Si, you look lovely darling!

LILIAN
A million dollars, love.

LOUIS
Feel any different Si?

SIMON
Not yet. Taking it as it comes.

LILIAN
Well good things come to you
tonight, young man.

She hands him their gift bag.

SIMON
Aw, cheers!

NINA
Go stick it with the rest, open
after dinner yeah?

SIMON
Killjoy.

Nina bats him playfully, as he dashes to the dining room.

LOUIS
So where's Dad?

NINA
In the lounge. Go say hello?

LILIAN
In a minute. Too early for a drink?

NINA
Never! Haven't got much, mind. Si
doesn't like it in the house. But
it's a special occasion, so I can
finish some vodka shit I mixed.

LILIAN
Lethal then?

NINA
Oh sweetheart, anything that kills
queers only makes us stronger.

They CHUCKLE, strolling to the kitchen, leaving Louis alone.

INT. LOUNGE - NIGHT

Louis treads in, facing BARNEY ADAMS watching TV (70s; Irish;
kind eyes betrayed by a stiff lip). BERNIE, a gorgeous St.
Bernard, greets Louis warmly.

LOUIS
 Alright Dad?

BARNEY
 Louis! How are you lad? Look, they
 trained a goat to lead a blind dog.
 Fascinating.

LOUIS
 You get here alright?

BARNEY
 Aye. Your er, sibling, gave us a
 lift. Your sweetheart with you?

LOUIS
 She doesn't like being called that.

BARNEY
 Ah, can't be kind anymore can we?
 Still, good you're both here for
 Simon. Soft lad, but a good heart.

LOUIS
 Aye. Part of the family.

Barney gives Louis a careful look, as Lilian and Nina traipse
 in with red wine and the lethal vodka.

LILIAN
 Evening Barney. You keeping well?

BARNEY
 Ah, here's the gorgeous girl now.
 How are you Lilian, sweetheart?

LILIAN
 Cracking heads, breaking necks. The
 usual. Got a wine for you?

BARNEY
 Ah, you're an angel. See Lou, 'that
 we do unto our brothers-'

LOUIS
 'We do unto the Lord.'

NINA
 You're paraphrasing again, Dad.

BARNEY
 Ah, but it's the meaning that
 counts. What's behind the words.
 Just like people.

LATER

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The family eat casserole, Bernie resting at Louis' feet.

BARNEY

Didn't have you down as a cook.

NINA

You pick things up.

LOUIS

Best give Lil the recipe. Then I can take a break from the kitchen.

LILIAN

Try it and you sleep in the garden.

BARNEY

Well I could be an extra pair of hands. Once you've got my room sorted.

NINA

I've still got room, Dad? You're closer to mine than theirs.

BARNEY

I'll feel safer in a medical man's home. Right Lou?

Nina wilts. Lilian reaches for Louis' hand under the table...and stops herself.

BARNEY (CONT'D)

So Simon, what are they teaching you now?

SIMON

GCSE mocks. They're alright. Maths drags though. And French. Why do I need French?

LILIAN

I know how you feel. Couldn't stick languages myself.

LOUIS

Aye. In one ear and out the other.

BARNEY

Oh don't decry it, Christ's sake!
When I was your age Simon, we were
studying Latin three times a week.
And now kids know nothing about it!
So take it all in. Secret words are
a gift to a chosen few.

NINA

Just like church.

SIMON

I'll try. I like English. Arthur
Miller and that. And the new P.S.E.
one. The sex ed exam.

Barney stops chewing.

BARNEY

And what does that entail?

SIMON

Biology stuff mainly. Reproduction.
Then there's STDS, contraception,
consent. We'll do gender identity
soon. Which means a load of lads
making gay jokes. Joy.

NINA

Well Cathy's said you've been very
mature in the lessons, so I've got
no worries there.

BARNEY

Who's that now?

SIMON

Social worker. She's nice. But
she's getting transferred soon.

NINA

I'm sure the replacement will be
just as good.

SIMON

Bet they won't be as fun. Or join
in like she did. She put condoms on
fruit and everything.

LILIAN

I envy you Si. We got a birthing
vid and a sub who couldn't work the
VCR.

(MORE)

LILIAN (CONT'D)

Universal symbol for Stop, she still hits Rewind. Like watching a Devil child going back inside.

NINA

I can top that. Remember Sister Rosie and her books, Lou?

LOUIS

Oh mate don't, I'll heave.

NINA

'The Lord and Your Body: A Guide to Health and Purity.' There was a nun on the cover doing this-

She folds her hands in prayer, a dowdy smile on her face. Everyone LAUGHS. Except Barney.

BARNEY

I remember Sister Rosie. Kind lady. Don't make fun.

NINA

Oh lighten up Dad, it's a new generation teaching us now.

LILIAN

Not that some don't want it. We had another incident today.

SIMON

Oh yeah, I heard. Someone smashed a window or something?

LILIAN

With a brick. It's fine, the police are looking at it.

LOUIS

Sorry, a brick?! Christ Lil, you alright?

LILIAN

I'm fine. Really. Whoever threw it's more scared than us.

LATER - CONT.

Table cleared. Simon opens Barney's gift: a box of miniatures. His smile is polite.

SIMON

Thanks Barney. My mates'll be happy.

NINA

You got him proper boozy ones there, Dad.

BARNEY

Let the lad live a little. Get him used to these before he's smashing 'em back like Grandad, eh?

Simon subtly sets them aside, opening Louis and Lilian's gift: luxury chocolates. His smile is real.

SIMON

Gold ones, nice! Thanks you two.

LILIAN

Still don't know why a lad wants posh chocs on his birthday?

SIMON

Never got anything like this before.

NINA

Well that leaves me last. Don't be fooled, it's bigger than it looks.

Nina hands Simon an envelope. He tears into it, pulling out forms. He reads. His hands tremble. His eyes water.

LOUIS

Si? You alright pal?

SIMON

Yeah, erm...this is real, right?

Nina smiles, eyes watering too.

SIMON (CONT'D)

Nina wants to adopt me.

Louis and Lilian twitch. Their smiles are careful.

LILIAN

That's brilliant, mate!

LOUIS

Amazing, pal!

They hug Simon tight.

LILIAN

Good on you Nina. Go on, go to Mum.

Simon lunges to hug Nina tight.

SIMON

You promise this is real?

NINA

Course it is, ya big softie. Happy
Birthday sweetheart.

Barney rises. He grips Simon's shoulders, lips tight.

BARNEY

Good on you lad. Really good on
you. I guess that means cake?

SIMON

Sounds good!

BARNEY

Great! I'll grab forks and plates.

He heads out too quickly. Louis and Lilian stare after him.
Nina fakes a smile.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Louis treads in, glancing at a homemade cake on the side.
Barney grips the sink, knuckles white.

BARNEY

You giving me a hand, boy?

LOUIS

You can do better than that.

BARNEY

Can't tell me you're not surprised?

LOUIS

She's doing a good thing.

BARNEY

We all do good things. Some more
good than others.

LOUIS

So, 'good on you lad', was that
good? You were talking to Simon
just then, right?

BARNEY

Don't patronise me Louis.

LOUIS

I'm not, I'm just asking you to-

BARNEY

Six months. Caitlyn's been gone six months. And Simon goes and gets all that right in front of you? That's cruel. And yet you say nothing. I don't know why you let Niall walk all over-

LOUIS

It's Nina. And she has every right to be a mother.

BARNEY

'Mother'. Christ. And what about you? When's your time again, boy?

LOUIS

It's not that easy. Me and Lil still want it again. That doesn't mean this hurts us.

BARNEY

I saw you twitch. It hurt you. But go ahead. Play pretend. Whatever helps with the hurt down there.

Louis tenses. He closes his legs a little.

LOUIS

That doesn't mean anything.

BARNEY

Then why you are acting like it does?

Barney gathers forks and plates, breezing out. BEAT. Louis lights the cake and carries it in, painting on a smile-

LOUIS

Happy Birthday to You-

As everyone JOINS IN, a shadow looms, filling the room. No-one notices.

EXT. MANCHESTER - ADAMS-BLAKE HOME - FRONT DRIVE - NIGHT

Louis and Lilian reach home. As they approach the front door, they notice-

The dented red car in next door's driveway.

LOUIS

Did they move in after we went?

LILIAN

Huh. Must've wanted to get sorted before the morning.

She heads inside. Louis follows pensive.

INT. ADAMS-BLAKE HOME - MAIN BEDROOM - NIGHT - CONT.

Louis and Lilian are in bed. They down tablets from separate prescription bottles: TESTOSTERONE and OESTROGEN.

LILIAN

You were gonna tell me about the exam?

LOUIS

Right right. They erm, numbed it all. Then stuck a needle in there.

LILIAN

Lovely. How that'd go?

LOUIS

Yeah erm, I got a little...hard.

LILIAN

You can say 'erection', you won't get struck down.

LOUIS

I know. Anyway, it means no vessel damage. Nothing on the ultrasound. So they asked about my surgeries and...I said I'm intersex. I mean, I actually said it out loud.

Lilian sits up, pride crossing her face.

LILIAN

That's great! God knows it wasn't easy when I said it out loud. What did the urologist say?

LOUIS

Same thing as always for phantom pain: 'go talk to someone'. Fob me off just to get me out of there.

LILIAN

I'm sure they meant well. That's why we do Fran's group: people who know what they're talking about. Because they've lived it. Your Dad say anything?

LOUIS

Didn't tell him. He's more a wait-and-pray type.

LILIAN

Well at least he came tonight.

LOUIS

You sure you're OK? Him moving in?

LILIAN

He needs the support. Plus we get a dog! Just means moving Caitlyn's stuff out.

Louis tenses.

LILIAN (CONT'D)

I feel bad for Nina, mind. She was adamant she'd take him in.

LOUIS

Yeah well, he's still getting his head around her. Made up for Si though. Kid deserves a home.

LILIAN

Ultimate birthday gift.

LOUIS

It's not too soon, is it?

LILIAN

She's had him two years now.

LOUIS

We fostered Caitlyn longer than that. You wanna be sure, after all.

LILIAN

Nina's a good mum. She wanted this. Like we wanted Caitlyn. You really think she'd mean anything by it?

LOUIS

No. You're right. Sorry. Ignore me, I'm being stupid.

LILIAN

Then I'm stupid with you, soft lad.

Louis smirks sadly. Lilian kisses his cheek-

He WINCES, gripping his thigh. She recoils, oddly guilty.

LILIAN (CONT'D)

Sorry. You want some water?

Louis shakes his head, BREATHING HARD. Lilian treads out alone. Louis SMACKS his pillow, face taut. Just as-

His testosterone bottle TIPS by itself, spilling everywhere. He stops confused, getting up to clear the mess, glancing out the window at next-door's drive. He freezes, staring at-

A RED-HAIRED MAN carrying a stained box into next-door's house. He looks just like Arthur.

EXT. ADAMS-BLAKE HOME - GARDEN - NIGHT

Lilian hovers outside, glassy eyes peering down the garden at-

Four white memorial crosses in the soil, one marked CAITLYN.

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. MANCHESTER - CHURCH - DAY

Lilian perches in the pews, MOURNERS around her, staring at Caitlyn's coffin. Louis gazes red-eyed from the podium. He glances at notes. Then screws them up.

LOUIS

I dread what's coming. People saying Caitlyn was my 'greatest achievement'. That can't be true, or she'd still be here. I mean, is it really an achievement if you don't make them yourself? Because it feels like theft. I didn't achieve her. I stole her.

(MORE)

LOUIS (CONT'D)
 And then I lost her. So what now?
 Add it to the list, I guess.

Lilian stares embarrassed at the floor.

PRESENT:

EXT. ADAMS-BLAKE HOME - GARDEN - NIGHT - CONT.

FLICKERING. SIZZLING. Lilian peers over next-door's fence at-

A RED-HAIRED WOMAN, dripping a hot candle on her open palm,
 face twisted in bliss. She looks just like Dara.

Lilian paces back inside, staring as she goes.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Lilian sags on the couch, rubbing her eyes. Her foot BRUSHES
 something. She reaches down. Her face falls.

INT. MAIN BEDROOM - NIGHT

Lilian trudges in, finding Louis dazed.

LOUIS
 I think I'm seeing things.

She holds up the fostering brochure. He freezes.

LILIAN
 Why was this under the couch?

LOUIS
 I thought you wouldn't find it?

LILIAN
 Would you tell me if I hadn't?

LOUIS
 Yes! Eventually.

LILIAN
 But why now? Right after Caitlyn?
 Right after everything we went
 through? The police; the adoption
 service; your Dad; the things they
 said about us?!

BEAT.

LOUIS

It's been six months, Lil. I know it's not long but, I miss it. I miss HER.

LILIAN

I know. I miss her too.

LOUIS

So is there potential or-?

LILIAN

Oh Lou, I don't know-

LOUIS

I'm not forcing anything. I just don't want to lose hope.

LILIAN

Who's losing hope? Because it is there y'know. It's just a matter of time, and planning, and getting shit together. And even then I don't know. I really don't. Sorry, you said you were seeing things?

Louis gazes at the floor.

LOUIS

I think I'm just tired.

He lies down-

LILIAN

Have you seen the neighbours? On the drive or, out the back?

LOUIS

A guy I think. By the car. Why?

LILIAN

Nothing. Just saw one of them. She had red hair. Like Dara's.

They glance at a framed photo of Arthur and Dara on the bedside cabinet.

LILIAN (CONT'D)

Doesn't feel too long ago, does it?

LOUIS

Never does.

LATER

INT. MAIN BEDROOM - NIGHT - CONT.

Louis and Lilian lie back-to-back.

A SOFT SOBBING through the wall. Lilian sits up. The SOBBING gets LOUDER, MORE DESPERATE, until-

SMACK! The SOBBING STOPS.

Lilian puts in earplugs. Louis lies awake, listening out.

INT. NEXT-DOOR'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Candlelight. A book of Latin script lies open.

The red-haired man and woman kneel naked under red cloaks. We see now it IS Arthur and Dara, tracing chalk around an UNSEEN FORM lying prone.

Dara mixes herbs and black liquid, forcing it down the form's throat. Arthur heats a long needle in the candle, dipping it in ink. The form struggles weakly, as he grips the left foot, raises it high...and PIERCES the sole-

INT. ADAMS-BLAKE HOME - MAIN BEDROOM - DAY - CONT.

Louis and Lilian wake in unison, staring at each other.

LILIAN

There's someone outside.

INT. HALL - DAY

Louis and Lilian tread downstairs. A SOFT RUSTLING outside the front door.

LOUIS

We didn't order anything, did we?

Something THUDS the door. Louis steps forward-

A HARDER THUD. He recoils.

LILIAN

Hello? Are you looking for someone?

A HAIL OF THUDS, shuddering the door in its frame-

LILIAN (CONT'D)
If you're trying to scare us, it's
not working!

The THUDDING STOPS. The SOFT RUSTLING again.

LOUIS
Do you want to-?

LILIAN
Nope, I've warned them. Your turn.

Louis treads over, peering through the peephole.

He UNLOCKS the door-

EXT. FRONT PORCH - DAY

The couple step out, staring down at-

A large red box on the doorstep. The street is deserted.

LOUIS
No post van anywhere.

LILIAN
Is it ticking?

Louis gives her a look.

LILIAN (CONT'D)
What? You wanna get blown up?

Louis leans closer to the box.

LOUIS
Can't hear anything.

LILIAN
Is there a stamp?

Louis scans the top of the box. His hand brushes a goat-like
symbol at the back-

The box JERKS. A TERRIBLE CRYING erupts within. The couple
lurch back. The crying softens to a DRY SOBBING. Louis
reaches out. Lilian grabs his wrist-

LILIAN (CONT'D)
Do we want to do that?

LOUIS
 You know what that sounds like,
 right? What if it is?

BEAT. Lilian lets go. Louis TEARS at the box, leaving-

A figure wrapped in paper. Wires wrapped around the arms,
 waist and thighs. Louis stares petrified, hands shaking.

LILIAN
 Lou, help me with this...Louis?!

Louis snaps out of it, rapidly untying the wires as Lilian
 RIPS the paper. They step back, gazing horrified at-

A pale androgynous BOY, in dirtied vest and underwear.
 Bruised skin, sweat-riddled hair, glassy bloodshot eyes.
 Wrists and ankles bound. Left foot bandaged and bloodied.

He sways. He sags. Louis catches him-

LOUIS
 W-what is this, Lil?

Lilian glances next-door. Smoke wafts from the porch.

She runs down the drive, picking up speed on the pavement-

LOUIS (CONT'D)
 Lil? Lil, wait!

-until she's dashing up to the front door-

It's ajar, smoke drifting out. She pushes it open-

INT. NEXT-DOOR'S HOUSE - HALL - DAY

Lilian steps cautiously down the hall, turning toward a
 doorway. She stops short. Her face twists with fright-

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Two bodies lie burning, blood seeping and trailing to a chalk
 circle on the floor. In the centre-

A goat's head, split in two, matter seeping down its face.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. MANCHESTER - HOSPITAL - PAEDIATRICS - DAY - CONT.

Louis and Lilian sit apart in a corridor, staring into space.

FOOTSTEPS. The couple glance up at an ambling figure-

JOHN DAY (30s, social support worker; kind face, clumsy gait, eager to please). A tatty satchel SLIPS off him, SPILLING forms and supplies everywhere.

JOHN
Goodness sake.

He kneels to collect them. Louis and Lilian join in.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Thank you both. I'm looking for Dr
Luca? She said Room 7.

LILIAN
Just in there, mate.

LOUIS
Take a seat if you like?

JOHN
Oh you're a star. Swear I spend
more time looking for the right
place than actually being in it.
I'd lose my own head if it wasn't
screwed on.

LOUIS
So you're a doctor then or-?

JOHN
Nurse. Former. Gave it up about ten
years ago now.

John sags down, offering a warm handshake.

JOHN (CONT'D)
John Day, Social Services. Council
got the call from Safeguarding. No-
one was touching this one, so my
manager volunteered me.

LILIAN
How much have they told you?

JOHN

Only that a child was found in a severely deprived state. You took them in and called the ambulance, right? Because of a fire?

LOUIS

Just doing the right thing.

JOHN

Amazing. Truly amazing. Y'know that's the sort of instinct you either have or you don't. And you two have got it.

Dr Luca emerges from a side room, followed closely by DI MATILDA 'MATTIE' COLLIER (40s, black; no-nonsense detective, struggles with compassion over instinct). Louis and Lilian tense. The DI avoids their steely gaze.

DR LUCA

John Day? Dr Anna Luca, Lead Consultant, Paediatrics.

DI COLLIER

DI Matilda Collier, Safeguarding Unit. Mattie.

JOHN

Pleasure. I was just chatting to the heroes of the hour.

DI COLLIER

Yes. We've met before. Though not in the best circumstances.

LOUIS

We lost our daughter, Caitlyn.

JOHN

Oh. I-I'm so sorry.

LILIAN

Not your fault. Same couldn't be said for us. For a while at least.

DI Collier shifts, guilt flashing over her face.

DI COLLIER

You're aware we'll liaise on a preliminary basis? Whether that continues is down to Safeguarding and the Council.

JOHN

Absolutely. I've got guides and stuff with me. Helps the kids know you're not a threat. How is he?

DR LUCA

Quiet. Anxious. Surprisingly lucid. Drawing's kept him occupied.

LOUIS

So what happens now?

DR LUCA

We'll need to perform a forensic protection exam. Where a child may lack capacity, we require adult consent. Would you be willing to provide it?

LILIAN

Us? We've got nothing to do with the kid. How can we consent?

DI COLLIER

Can we talk in private?

INT. SIDE OFFICE - DAY

Lilian paces agitated. Louis CLENCHES his shaking thigh.

LILIAN

Don't say too much, OK?

LOUIS

Why? We haven't done anything.

LILIAN

We took a bruised and bleeding boy into our home, from a box, left by two strangers who are now lying dead next-door. What would YOU think? Especially after Caitlyn?

LOUIS

Caitlyn was...we did nothing then, we've done nothing now.

LILIAN

Don't hold your breath. If they fucked us before, they can-

DI Collier treads in, perching opposite. Lilian SHUTS UP.

DI COLLIER

Sorry to keep you waiting. And I'm sorry you had to find the victims as they were. But the scene's been secured, so we'll have some answers soon. And at least the kid's safe. Always a plus in my job.

LILIAN

Must be nice. Knowing you're doing well. What do you want from us?

Patience etches across Collier's brow.

DI COLLIER

When you took him inside, did he speak at all? Tell you his name?

LOUIS

Kind of. He said WE had to tell HIM his name. Whatever that means.

DI COLLIER

The child's name is Noah.

The couple freeze.

LOUIS

N-Noah? Did he say that?

DI COLLIER

No. But Forensics sent over some findings from the house.

DI Collier opens a case file-

DI COLLIER (CONT'D)

Did you know your neighbours well?

LOUIS

Only arrived last night. Didn't even get to meet them.

DI COLLIER

Well it doesn't look like they planned to stay. Or keep Noah.

She pushes over photos of a desolate room. A bloodied belt lies in one corner.

DI COLLIER (CONT'D)

This wall is opposite your bedroom. Did you hear anything last night?

LOUIS
Sobbing. And slapping. Might
support an abuse thing.

LILIAN
Then why reveal it? Why leave us
THEIR kid for us to find like that?

DI COLLIER
Do the names Arthur and Dara Gress
mean anything to you?

BEAT.

LILIAN
What about them?

Collier pushes over a legal document: a Will.

DI COLLIER
This was next to the bodies. It's a
Last Will and Testament, naming you
as Noah's legal guardians.

Louis and Lilian sit stunned.

LILIAN
It actually says that?

DI COLLIER
Section B5: 'We appoint Louis Adams
and Lilian Blake, residents of 5
Berith Road, Manchester, as the
guardians of Noah Gress, our child
under 18 years, at our deaths.'
Signed: Arthur and Dara Gress.

The couple pour over the Will. They sag.

LOUIS
It's not real. This can't be real?

DI COLLIER
I know this must come as a shock.
Only Forensics said you had photos
in your home together.

LILIAN
You're not saying-?

DI COLLIER
We're still IDing the bodies. But
it's looking likely it's them.

LILIAN
That's not possible.

DI COLLIER
Oh? How so?

LILIAN
You wouldn't believe us. Got form
for it.

DI COLLIER
Mrs Blake, I know-

LILIAN
Ms. Not Mrs. We're not married.

DI COLLIER
I know we've made mistakes. But our
previous investigation found you
weren't at fault for what happened
to Caitlyn. I believe that. Can you
try to trust I'd believe you now?

BEAT.

LOUIS
Arthur and Dara died seven years
ago.

Collier stares. She opens her notebook, pen gripped tight.

LOUIS (CONT'D)
They were friends. Good friends.
Met them at the support group
actually. Community art gig. We had
a laugh, mellowed them out a bit,
they opened us up more. Then erm-

The couple avoid the DI's gaze.

LOUIS (CONT'D)
We tried for a kid. They wanted to
help so, we let them be surrogates.
Had the IVF. All fine. Then...there
was an accident. Car crash. A freak
thing. We lost the baby too.

DI COLLIER
I'm sorry to hear that.

LILIAN
It doesn't make sense. We had a
funeral. How can it be them?

DI COLLIER

We'll need to look into that. But right now, our main concern lies with what to do about Noah.

KNOCKING. Dr Luca peeks in, stoic face etched with urgency.

DR LUCA

There's something you need to see.

INT. PAEDIATRICS - SIDE ROOM - DAY

The boy, NOAH (7), hunches in bed, hospital gown on, drip attached, scrawling pictures with bruised hands. John perches nearby, a clock face and reading pages in his lap. A CLINICAL NURSE and FORENSIC ASSISTANT observe.

Louis, Lilian, Dr Luca and DI Collier slip in quietly. Noah's head whips up, caution unwavering.

JOHN

Hello again!

LILIAN

Hi. How you doing, kid?

NOAH

Do you know my name?

LOUIS

Yes. It's Noah, right?

Relief slips over Noah's face. He GRIPS the couple's hands-

NOAH

I know you now. And you know me too. Thank you.

LILIAN

You're brave, aren't you?

JOHN

Isn't he? Noah's been showing me how to draw, haven't you?

Noah pushes over a pad, showing sketches of birds, lions, cows, and strange winged humans.

LILIAN

Wow! Little artist, aren't we?

NOAH

John's an eagle. So I trust him.

JOHN

My favourite bird. We've played a few games as well. He can count big numbers, and tell the time too. Reading's a bit slow but, bit tired aren't we mate?

DR LUCA

We've already removed the wires-

She TAPS an evidence tray, bloodied wires scattered inside.

DR LUCA (CONT'D)

-and Forensics took swabs and photo evidence as required.

DI COLLIER

Great. We'll get them processed.

DR LUCA

Hi Noah, remember me? Is it alright if I show them your foot?

NOAH

Yes. I trust you.

Dr Luca leads the couple and DI around the bed. They freeze, gazing shocked. Inked deep in Noah's bloodied left sole-

INSERT: 'Ne pueri tui fit immaculatus sit, et ut in tantis afficiar malis.'

DR LUCA

It's very intricate. And clean. I'm amazed it's clotted so quickly.

NOAH

The creature people did it. To keep me safe. Keep everyone safe.

DR LUCA

He has other injuries like this.

DI COLLIER

What kind of injuries?

The forensic assistant SCROLLS through a camera. One photo makes Collier FLINCH. She nods: 'I get the picture.'

LOUIS

What is it?

DI COLLIER

From experience, those injuries are consistent with ritual abuse. Especially the more sensitive ones.

Louis freezes. Lilian SWALLOWS-

LILIAN

And by 'sensitive', you mean-?

DR LUCA

We believe Noah may be a victim of genital mutilation.

BEAT.

DR LUCA (CONT'D)

We checked he understood the exam. He won't talk about it yet. And he doesn't know why someone would do that to him. But we've taken swabs, and we'll make sure he gets-

Louis LURCHES from the room. Lilian cringes.

LILIAN

He'll need a few minutes.

DI Collier approaches the bed, voice gentle-

DI COLLIER

Noah, you know if someone's hurt you, you won't be in trouble for telling the truth, right?

NOAH

Yes. I trust you. But no-one hurt me like that. I promise.

Collier gives Dr Luca a look: 'No use pushing too hard.'

DR LUCA

You've done really well, Noah. Shall we see about a wash?

NOAH

I need the man and lady to do it.

LILIAN

Wash you? Is that allowed?

DR LUCA

It's not unusual. As long as it's noted down.

JOHN
 I could help? I do support work.
 Looking after kids with needs,
 getting them washed for school?

He hands over I.D., certificates and DBS guidelines.

DR LUCA
 Very well. Though you may want to
 prepare yourselves.

LATER

INT. PAEDIATRICS - PRIVATE ROOM - DAY

John and the clinical nurse bathe Noah. Louis kneels, holding his hand. Lilian hovers nearby.

Noah's free hand TAP TAP TAPS on the water. His bare chest reveals a tragic sight: vast scar tissue, like skin grafts. Louis can't help staring...

FLASHBACK TO:

INT. IRELAND - FAMILY HOME - BATHROOM - DAY

YOUNG LOUIS (7) hunches in a bathtub. Gentle hands SMOOTH soap over his bruised back. He relaxes into them.

JOHN (V.O.)
 Recovered?

PRESENT:

INT. PAEDIATRICS - PRIVATE ROOM - DAY

Louis FLINCHES back to reality.

LOUIS
 Hmm. So why'd you stop nursing?

JOHN
 Not enough support. All work and no
 sleep makes John a sad boy.

LILIAN
 And kids are easier?

JOHN

No. Just more unpredictable. Keeps things exciting. Right Noah? Kids are better than grown-ups, yeah?

NOAH

I don't know. The creature people kept me from them. Is it because I look strange?

LILIAN

Do you think you look strange?

NOAH

I don't know.

Louis squeezes Noah's hand.

LOUIS

You look super, kid.

Noah's left hand CURLS, fingers TWITCHING. As if something is missing.

INT. PAEDIATRICS - SIDE ROOM - DAY

Louis, Lilian and Dr Luca watch Noah sleeping.

DR LUCA

We'll observe Noah for a few days, then run a full MMSE interview with a therapist. If you'll excuse me?

She slips out, leaving the couple alone.

LOUIS

You saw that, right? His chest? How mirrored it was? Like someone knew what they were do-?

LILIAN

Stop. Please. Just for a bit.

BEAT.

LOUIS

So what do you think? Do we do it?

LILIAN

I don't know what to think! It's fucked up, Lou. That's our names in the Will. Our address. Are we actually bound to the kid?

LOUIS

They left the docs. If it is them,
maybe it's what they wanted?

LILIAN

I VERY much doubt anyone who does
that to a kid knows what they want.
I mean there's care homes and shit,
why not do that? Why do this to us?
Why were they fucking ALIVE still?!

Louis SHUSHES her. Noah doesn't stir.

LILIAN (CONT'D)

Suppose we did take him: what do we
tell people? Is he a replacement? A
box-ticker? 'We've been cut, he's
been cut, it's a perfect fit?'

LOUIS

Jesus Lil-!

LILIAN

Someone's gonna think it Lou, I'm
just getting in first! What about
his foot? Any idea what it means?

LOUIS

No. Don't know if I want to. Don't
know how he's so calm after that.

LILIAN

That's not calm. You saw his hand
tapping the water? He's distracting
himself. I know what it's like.

LOUIS

Same.

BEAT.

LOUIS (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. About yesterday. I get
if you're not ready to try again.

Lilian wanders over, peering at Noah. She softens.

LILIAN

He held on tight eh? Relaxed with
us. Takes you back, doesn't it?

Louis manages a sad smile, brushing Noah's hand.

LOUIS

I'll ask to cover an early shift
Monday. Keep an eye on him.

LILIAN

Cool. I'll keep schtum at work.
Don't want any gossip. When d'you
wanna tell your family?

LOUIS

Tomorrow. Sunday roast.

LILIAN

Baptism by fire. Fun.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

INT. MANCHESTER - NINA'S HOME - DINING ROOM - DAY

Louis and Lilian eat quietly, Bernie's head in Louis' lap. Barney watches them suspiciously, while Nina and Simon CHAT-

NINA
You get all your work done?

SIMON
Just some P.S.E. left. Sexual
abuse.

Lilian's knife SCRAPES her plate. Louis CHOKES on his water.

BARNEY
Something wrong?

LILIAN
Fine. Just tired.

BARNEY
On a Sunday? Sabbath's brightest.
Should be in vigor. Full of light!

LOUIS
Light burns out quick for us, Dad.

NINA
This is nice, isn't it? Twice in
one week. You'll have to invite us
round to yours soon, Lou.

Louis eyes Lilian: 'should we?'. Barney notices.

BARNEY
Aye aye. Touched a nerve, lad?

LOUIS
No. Don't want you seeing our mess,
that's all.

BARNEY
What mess? Not like you've got
kiddies under your feet.

Lilian tenses. Louis opens his mouth...and shuts it.

NINA
Dad, help with the scones please?

She breezes out. Barney trudges after her. BEAT.

LOUIS

How you doing Si? You have a good time Saturday?

SIMON

Yeah, saw my mates. Told them about the adoption. They got me a load of sweets and art stuff to celebrate.

NINA (O.S.)

You know exactly what you meant, I'm not stupid.

BARNEY (O.S.)

He doesn't need you defending him all the time, let him stand up for himself for once!

NINA (O.S.)

Easier said than done with you breathing down his neck. You don't get over losing a kid like THAT, so being passive-aggressive solves nothing. Not that you don't have a track record, the spite I get!

BARNEY (O.S.)

Oh Christ's sake Niall-

NINA (O.S.)

Don't you DARE call me that! Don't fucking avoid me like that! It's only hard if you make it hard. So please try to give me some respect for who I am, and what I do, and I'll happily give it back.

Lilian rubs Simon's shoulder. He smiles gratefully.

LATER

INT. NINA'S HOME - HALL - DAY

Nina sees Louis and Lilian out.

NINA

Sorry about him.

LILIAN

It's you we're sorry for, mate.

NINA

I can handle him. Now, are you gonna tell me what's bothering you? And don't say dinner.

BEAT.

LOUIS

Do you think it's right for us to try again?

Nina dithers, speaking carefully-

NINA

You've been through what no-one should have to go through. People talked. Stirred shit up. You've every right to be wary. But you also have every right to care. And I can't think who deserves another chance more.

Louis and Lilian peer at each other.

EXT. MANCHESTER - PRIMARY SCHOOL - DAY

BREAKTIME. Lilian supervises, flicking through photos of Arthur and Dara on her phone, lost in thought.

DISEMBODIED VOICE (V.O.)

Blake?...Blake?...

Lilian peers up. She freezes, staring through the fence at-

A FIGURE in a GOAT MASK, staring back in the distance.

REBECCA (O.S.)

Ms Blake? It hurts.

Lilian FLINCHES, facing Rebecca, left palm bleeding. She leads the girl away, glancing back through the fence.

The figure is gone.

INT. PRIMARY SCHOOL - SICK BAY - DAY

Lilian and Fran apply a plaster to Rebecca's hand.

FRAN

There we go lovie. All better?

Rebecca nods, head down.

LILIAN
Something else?

REBECCA
Why do the mummies and daddies get
mad at you?

LILIAN
Because they think we're silly.
They don't think you should learn
about difference. And respect. Do
they scare you?

REBECCA
No. Mummy says they just don't like
themselves. And you can't be scared
if you like yourself. And I like my
hair, my clothes, my school, and
drawing, and chocolate cake, and-

LILIAN
You like a lot, don't you?!

REBECCA
And I really like you, Ms Blake.
You'd be a good mummy. Wouldn't
she, Ms Moloch?

FRAN
I think she'd be a wonderful mummy.
Go on lovie, off you pop.

Rebecca runs off to play. Lilian sags.

LILIAN
Wish I believed that.

FRAN
Belief's a funny thing. Inspires as
much doubt as it does hope. That's
why I love the kiddies: they're all
hope. Keep me young at heart. Keep
me believing in what's right. And
it wouldn't be right if I didn't
believe you weren't good enough.

LILIAN
You really think that?

FRAN
With every part of me, lovie.
You're ripe for it.

BEAT.

LILIAN
Can I tell you something?

INT. MANCHESTER - HOSPITAL - PAEDIATRICS - DAY - CONT.

A playroom of colourful tables, toys, and art supplies.

Noah crouches over a sand tray, building two houses from blocks. Cars, figurines and model animals litter the sand.

John CHATS with a PLAY THERAPIST nearby-

JOHN
Noah's taken to them quick. 'Hold my hand' quick. Most kids won't let you near them. Too painful.

PLAY THERAPIST
Not this one. Nurses said his pain threshold's something else.

Louis peeks out from the corridor, watching Noah's twitching fingers trace symbols around a baby doll in the sand.

NOAH
I'll make you safe.

Noah places a bull on the left; a lion on the right; an eagle north; a soldier south, a gold ring over its head.

He suddenly rifles through the toy drawers, utterly panicked-

PLAY THERAPIST
What do you need, Noah?

NOAH
I don't know what they're called!

Louis steps out worried. Noah relaxes, limping over glassy-eyed. Louis kneels to hold his shaking hands-

LOUIS
Hey Noah. Why the tears, pal?

NOAH
I can't find what I need.

LOUIS
Can you draw it?

Noah scrawls two naked figures with silvery hair and scarred flesh on card, standing them vigil over the baby.

LOUIS (CONT'D)
Who are they?

 NOAH
They keep the baby safe. From the
creature people.

Noah places the baby and card figures outside a block house.

 LOUIS
And what do the creature people do?

Noah places two goats outside the other block house. A snake
drapes the roof. A red car outside.

 NOAH
They hurt the baby.

His left hand CURLS again, fingers TWITCHING.

 LOUIS
Your hand OK?

 NOAH
It's missing. Something's missing.

LATER

Noah hunches, reading a picture book, as Louis and John CHAT-

 JOHN
He calmed down quick. You must have
a gift.

 LOUIS
Just experience. Reminds me of me
at his age.

 JOHN
Still deciding?

 LOUIS
What would you do?

 JOHN
I care for so many kids, Louis. All
I can say is...it's rewarding.

Louis watches Noah's CURLING left hand, lost in thought.

INT. MANCHESTER - POLICE STATION - DI'S OFFICE - DAY

DI Collier pours through photos of Noah's injuries. PC Cooper treads in, handing over forensics files.

PC COOPER

Boss? Positive match on the bodies from Berith Road. It's Arthur and Dara Gress. No next of kin.

DI COLLIER

Explains the Will.

PC COOPER

Another thing: coroner recommends the Council arranges the funeral. Cover costs and that.

DI COLLIER

I'll get onto them. And Louis Adams and Lilian Blake too, they might want some input.

PC COOPER

You think that's a good idea?

DI COLLIER

People grieve in different ways. Having some control is natural. To an extent.

She pauses on a seven year-old newspaper cutting:

INSERT: 'IVF COUPLE KILLED IN CAR CRASH HORROR'. A photo of Arthur and Dara next to the red car. A goat-like symbol is etched in the paintwork.

INT. MANCHESTER - ADAMS-BLAKE HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Louis and Lilian lie in bed.

LILIAN

OK. If this is happening, we need to be on the same page. Why should we do this?

LOUIS

Experience. Structure. Trying again. Feeling good again. And helping a kid who needs it most.

LILIAN

Right. Good. Solid list. We'd need character refs. Who'd we trust?

LOUIS

Nina. Simon. John and Dom. And Fran's a good bet, I'm sure.

LILIAN

What about work?

LOUIS

We could take leave. And my Dad would be here too?

Lilian sits up sharpish.

LILIAN

You're not serious?

LOUIS

We did promise him.

LILIAN

You really think he'll understand? Where'd they both even sleep? Playroom's full as it is, we've only got one bed left.

LOUIS

Right. Caitlyn's.

LILIAN

I'm sorry Lou. But if we do this, Noah needs space to heal. And your Dad? It's just not wise. You'll have to tell him.

Louis wilts.

LOUIS

Right. And what about Caitlyn?

LILIAN

It's not her room anymore. We'd need a clear-out. Can you do that?

Louis turns over...and nods.

INT. MANCHESTER - HOSPITAL - PAEDIATRICS - DAY

Louis and Lilian settle next to Noah in the side room.

LILIAN
 Noah, you know you can leave soon?
 Well, your Mum and Dad-

NOAH
 Not Mum and Dad. Creature people.

LILIAN
 Right. They've gone away. Which
 means you might have to come live
 with us. Would you like that?

Noah's fingers TAP TAP TAP his blankets.

NOAH
 Will you keep me safe?

LOUIS
 Of course. We promise.

NOAH
 Then yes. I would like that.

LOUIS
 Wow. Right. OK! We'll be happy to
 have you.

Lilian manages a cautious smile.

INT. MANCHESTER - CITY COUNCIL - SOCIAL SERVICES - DAY

John rubs tired eyes, skimming case files at his desk.

DOMINIC (O.S.)
 John, Johnny Boy, Little Johnny
 Green! I trust your head's screwed
 on tight today eh?

John cringes, as Dominic strides up cheerily-

JOHN
 Morning Dom.

DOMINIC
 Message for you, Dom's Honour:
 special request on your behalf for
 Safeguarding. The Noah Gress case?

JOHN
 Oh his injuries Dom. The poor kid.

DOMINIC

Hmm. Good news though: you'll be joining a CAFCASS Officer in Noah's guardian proceedings.

JOHN

'Proceedings'? You mean they're doing it?!

MONTAGE:

INT. MANCHESTER - SHOPS - DAY

- Lilian picks out simple understated kids' clothes.
- She picks out lion, cow and eagle soft toys, and an artist's pad and pencils.
- She picks out vitamins and toiletries, taking a bottle of sleep aid...she dithers...she puts it back.

INT. MANCHESTER - ADAMS-BLAKE HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

- Louis seals photos of Arthur and Dara in a cardboard box.

EXT. ADAMS-BLAKE HOME - GARDEN - DAY

- Louis buries three white crosses in the shed, LOCKING it shut. He turns to leave. Something THUMPS nearby. He gazes back at the one white cross left in the soil: Caitlyn's.

Louis kneels, digging to pull out...a gilded red ball.

INT. ADAMS-BLAKE HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

- Louis cleans the ball. Faint runes cover its surface, a papery RATTLING within. He stares in awe. As if hypnotised.

INT. MANCHESTER - HOSPITAL - PAEDIATRICS - DAY

- In the side room: Louis and Lilian set Noah's clothes, toys and meds before him. He gazes stunned, lost in the comforts.

LILIAN

All for you, mate. You deserve it.

LOUIS
 And a final special something. A
 little distraction?

He holds out the red ball. Noah takes it, SHAKING it. An odd
 recognition crosses his face.

The couple manage a smile, as Louis DIALS a number-

LOUIS (CONT'D)
 Hi. Listen, Lil and I need your
 help. And you can't tell Dad.

INT. MANCHESTER - ADAMS-BLAKE HOME - PLAYROOM - DAY

- A stern REPORTING OFFICER (50s) surveys Caitlyn's untouched
 toys, making notes. Louis and Lilian hover anxious.

EXT. ADAMS-BLAKE HOME - GARDEN - DAY

- The Officer stares at Caitlyn's white cross in the soil,
 doodling symbols in their pad.

INT. ADAMS-BLAKE HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

- The Officer sees themselves out-

REPORTING OFFICER
 We'll be in touch.

- END MONTAGE.

INT. MANCHESTER - FAMILY COURT - DAY

Louis and Lilian wait tensely at the dock, while the Officer
 and SHERIFF check the Will. Noah waits with John and Dominic.
 Seated in the rows are DI Collier, Dr Luca, Fran...and Nina.

SHERIFF
 Taking into account the applicants'
 previous experience; the Reporting
 Officer's inspection; and all
 statements offered; I hereby rule
 in the interests of Noah Gress to
 enter into a Guardianship Order
 under Louis Adams and Lilian Blake.

The Officer lays out a consent form, grinning oddly. Louis
 and Lilian hesitate...and sign.

GENTLE APPLAUSE. Nina looks utterly proud. The couple return grateful smiles.

Noah watches intently, left hand CURLING around his gilded red ball. His fingers TWITCH over the runes.

A shadow SEEPS over the room, casting all in darkness. All except Louis, Lilian...and Noah.

No-one notices.

END OF SHOW