

The Orphans of Mansfield Hall

Written by

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FADE IN:

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, DORMITORY - NIGHT

UNCLE BRIAN, 68, warm and bubbling, chubby, sits on a bed. His thin, grey hair covers little of his bald head.

Numerous CHILDREN, aged from 6 to 14 sit on beds around him.

Uncle Brian talks to the children. The children listen intently.

UNCLE BRIAN

- So the little girl quietly creeps up to the old, wooden door. And knocked, not once, not twice, but three times, just as the old lady had told her to do.

(beat)

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK.

(beat)

The door slowly creaks open to reveal a huge, dark room, filled with hundreds and hundreds of candles.

Uncle Brian turns to ELKIE, 12. Elkie wears a dressing gown full of patches. Her wide eyes stare at UNCLE BRIAN.

UNCLE BRIAN (CONT'D)

What does the little girl do, Elkie? Does she enter the castle, or go home?

Elkie pauses, in thought.

ELKIE

(whispering)

She goes inside.

A gasp is heard from one of the younger children.

Uncle Brian nods, smiling.

UNCLE BRIAN

Very well.

He addresses the group again.

UNCLE BRIAN (CONT'D)

The little girl is cautious. She steps onto the large doorstep and peaks around the corner. All is silent, except for the drip of a tap.

(beat)

DRIP, DRIP, DRIP.

(MORE)

UNCLE BRIAN (CONT'D)

(beat)

As she steps into the room, the dripping suddenly ... stops.

Another gasp is heard from one of the children.

Uncle Brian picks up a glass of water, takes a sip. He puts the glass down.

UNCLE BRIAN (CONT'D)

"Who enters my castle!" A big booming voice comes from the darkness. The little girl jumps, but keeps calm.

(beat)

"I just want to find my teddy!" Shouts the girl into the darkness. Silence... until a shuffling noise.... Coming from the other side of the room. The little girl stands there, staring into the darkness, waiting for that thing... whatever it was, to emerge.

(beat)

The shuffling gets louder and louder, and the little girl stands there, as strong as a tree, until out of the darkness comes -

The door across the other side of the room suddenly flings open, and a figure emerges, a sheet over his head, wailing.

The children scream, some of them jump under the beds, others put their hands over their face.

Uncle Brian smiles.

The figure suddenly starts to laugh. BRENT, 15, pulls the sheet from his head. He collapses on the floor with laughter.

One by one, the other children start laughing too. Uncle Brian nods to Brent, smiling.

MONTAGE:

ELKIE (V.O.)

Uncle Brian... our hero. He brought us up from babies, making us the "young adults" we are today.

1. Uncle Brian, Elkie, Brent and the other children slowly emerge behind a huge hill.

Elkie is first to make it to the top. She shrieks with glee, and throws herself into the lush, green grass, on the other side of the hill.

The others follow, and soon everyone rolls on their sides down the hill.

ELKIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
We all loved him. He loved us.

2. The children stir cake mix in bowls, roll out biscuits on trays. Flour is on everyone's faces.

Uncle Brian pulls out a large tray of biscuits from the oven.
The season changes from spring to summer.

3. The children throw pillows at each other, as they laugh. Feathers fly everywhere.

The season changes from autumn to winter.

The children lay in bed, asleep.

3. Uncle Brian steps through the open door. He smiles at the children, and flicks the light switch. The light goes out.

END MONTAGE.

FADE OUT.

EXT. MANSFIELD HALL - DAY

ELKIE (V.O.)
Look at the place we lived in.
Beautiful, we couldn't be happier.

Green pastures surround a group of old stone buildings.

Fruit trees, hedges, and the trickle of a stream are present.

ELKIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
But the day that car came. That
day, everything changed ...

A car meanders along a dirt driveway.

Mr PRESTON, 26, glasses, suit and tie, drives.

The car heads towards Mansfield Hall.

EXT. STREAM - DAY

Elkie sits on the edge of the stream. Her feet dip in the water.

She rests her head on TRAD, 13, handsome, who sits next to her.

A comfortable silence.

TRAD

What's it like... you know...

ELKIE

You know, what?

TRAD

Well, you know. Not knowing your parents.

Pause.

ELKIE

Fine.

TRAD

Really?

ELKIE

Yeah. They didn't buy me clothes and help me at school and stuff, Uncle Brian - your grandad did. So I don't really need them, do I?

Pause.

TRAD

Yeah, I suppose not.

ELKIE

Why did you ask me that then? You have never asked me that before, and you have known me, for like, ever.

TRAD

I was just wondering.

ELKIE

Okay.

(beat)

Hey, when we are older, is our house going to be painted white or green?

Trad smiles.

TRAD

Which one do you think it should be?

ELKIE

Yellow.

Elkie smiles.

TRAD

Yellow it is. With a fence out the front to keep our dog in.

ELKIE

And rose bushes everywhere! And a big table out the back for people to come and eat on! And we can grow our own vegetables! It's gonna be the best!

TRAD

The best...

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, HALLWAY

A knock at the door. A smiling Uncle Brian opens it, Mr Preston stands there.

PRESTON

Umm, hello, Brian Trechford?

Uncle Brian nods.

UNCLE BRIAN

Yes, young man. How can I help you?

PRESTON

I have bad news.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, KITCHEN

Uncle Brian pours tea into two cups.

Preston sits at the table.

PRESTON

I'm from the National Orphanage Association, or NAO. We look at the wellbeing and overall condition of orphanages around the country.

UNCLE BRIAN

Well this ones fine. We haven't had any troubles lately, and the kids are learning -

PRESTON

Mr Trechford, that is not the issue. This orphanage comes highly recommended, and is quite popular among those planning to adopt.

Uncle Brian nods, passes a cup of tea to Preston.

PRESTON (CONT'D)

The issue here today is the new law being passed next week. Three children became very sick due to a lack of food in an orphanage in Risdon last month. Their caretaker died at the age of 75 in his sleep. The maid found him two days later. The children were not competent enough to find food on their own.

UNCLE BRIAN

Well, I'm not 75.

PRESTON

I know Mr Trechford. But the organisation I work for wants to make sure this never happens again. The new law states that all caretakers must be under the age of 50, and have an assistant.

Pause.

UNCLE BRIAN

So what are you saying?

PRESTON

I'm saying that it might be time to retire Mr Trechford. There will be a replacement coming for you on Monday. I'm sorry.

Uncle Brian sits down.

UNCLE BRIAN

I love the children. They love me. They need me...

PRESTON

This is not my choice Mr Trechford. You can still visit the children, just not be their caretaker.

Uncle Brian runs his hand through his hair.

UNCLE BRIAN

This is not right. I will not leave the children to some other person who knows nothing about them.

PRESTON

Please -

UNCLE BRIAN

No, let me finish. Seven years ago I came to Mansfield Hall with my grandson with the one aim of making his life better since his parents, my daughter, died.

(beat)

I wasn't going to sit on the sidelines for him to wallow in sadness and pity. I took him under my wing and made him the great young man he is today. Other's heard about him and I, and I started to look after children whose opportunity to ever know their parents was stripped from them; taken from them before they barely had the chance of experiencing the closest bond to another person any child can ever know.

(beat)

I got a license to be in charge of this here orphanage and I single handedly brought up the children here to be loving, caring, good people. I taught them to cook, read and write, something their parents couldn't do.

PRESTON

Yes, but -

UNCLE BRIAN

And you're asking me to just pack up and leave them?! You're asking me to just abandon them?! This is not right Mr Preston. We need each other. Me leaving could wreck their lives. Do you want to be responsible for that? Do you?!

Mr Preston shakes his head. Silence.

PRESTON

I am very sorry, but I am just passing on information. It is not my choice.

Uncle Brian shakes his head. He starts to speak, stops himself.

Pause.

He puts out his hand. Preston shakes it.

UNCLE BRIAN
Well, thank you for passing that
information on.

Preston nods, stands up.

PRESTON
Have a good day Mr Trechford.

EXT. STREAM - DAY

A sleeping Elkie rests her head on Trad. Trad pushes her hair
out of her eyes and smiles.

The stream gurgles.

FADE OUT.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, KITCHEN - LATER

Uncle Brian holds a phone to his ear.

ELKIE (V.O.)
Uncle Brian did all he could to get
around the new rule, but nothing he
tried worked.

UNCLE BRIAN
Is it true then? That -
(beat)
Okay but can we do anything?
(beat)
Please, I need your help.
(beat)
If that's the only way to get
around it then okay. Fine.

FADE OUT.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The children sit at a long table. They eat and chat.

ELKIE (V.O.)
I will never forget the day he told
us the news. It will stick in my
memory forever.

Uncle Brian stands up at the end of the table. He clears his
throat. The children become quiet.

UNCLE BRIAN
 Children, I have news, and I
 thought now was the best time to
 tell everyone, as we are all
 together.

Uncle Brian sighs, clears his throat.

UNCLE BRIAN (CONT'D)
 A man came to me today, and told me
 that I cannot look after you
 anymore.

A gasp from some of the children.

UNCLE BRIAN (CONT'D)
 I will come visit lots, but I am
 moving back to my home in Tranmere.
 Someone else is coming to look
 after you on Monday.

BRENT
 What about camping next weekend?
 Will the new person take us
 camping?

UNCLE BRIAN
 I'm really not sure -

SARAH, 11, small and cute puts up her hand.

UNCLE BRIAN (CONT'D)
 Yes, Sarah?

SARAH
 Uncle Brian, will we still have
 Christmas?

UNCLE BRIAN
 I'm sure whoever is coming will
 make Christmas really fun for
 everybody -

ELKIE
 Will they make up bedtime stories?

UNCLE BRIAN
 I don't know -

Trad looks from Elkie to Uncle Brian.

TRAD
 Does that mean... am I, am I coming
 with you?

Uncle Brian slowly nods.

TRAD (CONT'D)

But...

Trad suddenly stands up. He runs out of the room.

Elkie holds back tears, as does Uncle Brian.

The other children start chatting loudly.

Uncle Brian goes after Trad.

EXT. TREEHOUSE - NIGHT

Uncle Brian climbs up a wooden ladder into the treehouse.

Trad sits in the treehouse. He carves a stick with a knife.

UNCLE BRIAN

Hey.

Uncle Brian sits down next to Trad.

UNCLE BRIAN (CONT'D)

I'm sorry about -

TRAD

I'm staying here.

UNCLE BRIAN

Trad, you can't.

TRAD

Why not?!

UNCLE BRIAN

Because I promised your parents I would look after you. And that means coming with me.

TRAD

Mum and Dad aren't here. So who cares what they think.

UNCLE BRIAN

Yes, but I'm here. And I know you care what I think.

Pause. Trad sniffs.

UNCLE BRIAN (CONT'D)

We will visit. Often.

TRAD

Tranmere is four hours away.

Pause.

TRAD (CONT'D)

Can Elkie come?

UNCLE BRIAN

I don't think so. She belongs here,
with the others. This is her home -

TRAD

This is my home too! I belong here!

Trad stands up and climbs down the ladder.

Uncle Brian sighs.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, DORMITORY

Elkie, Trad, Brent and SUZ, 12, chubby with glasses, sit on a
bed.

Puzzle pieces are strewn out between them, and a half
finished puzzle.

Trad is trying to force a piece in where it clearly doesn't
fit.

SUZ

It doesn't go -

TRAD

I know, I'm just -

SUZ

Well why are you trying if -

TRAD

Just shut up for two seconds Suz!

Pause.

SUZ

What's your problem, I'm just
trying to help you!

TRAD

Yeah, well you aren't helping. Do
you even care? Do you?

SUZ

Care about what?

TRAD

About Granddad. And I. Leaving.

SUZ

Of course I do!

TRAD

Well it doesn't sound like it -

ELKIE

Come on guys, please! Stop arguing. We all care that he is leaving, and we all hate it. But there isn't anything we can do, it's outta our hands.

Pause.

TRAD

Whatever.

ELKIE

Trad?

Trad sighs.

TRAD

Sorry Suz.

Suz nods.

INT. UNCLE BRIAN'S BEDROOM - MORNING

SUPER: Monday.

Three suitcases sit neatly beside a bed.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, KITCHEN

The children eat breakfast. The chatter level is high.

ELKIE (V.O.)

The day had come, and everyone was nervous about who was going to look after us. None of us were ready for who it was.

SARAH

I hope it's a woman. Do you think it will be a woman?

BRENT

It's gonna be a man. Women can't do nothing.

Sarah pokes her tongue out at Brent.

Elkie and Trad sit there in silence, their food untouched.

SARAH

Do you think she can cook good food? I bet shes can sing.

BRENT

I bet he knows how to ride a boat.
So he can teach me.

EXT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

A car speeds down the dirt driveway. We don't see the drivers face.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

SARAH

What if she's really fat...

Sarah giggles. Brent shakes his head.

BRENT

He won't be fat. You can't ride a
boat if you are fat, it will sink.

EXT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

A mosquito comes to a stop on the dashboard of the car.

A gloved hand suddenly squashes it.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

SARAH

She can teach me how to dance! And
I can be famous and people will
watch me from everywhere! They will
come see Sarah the Great!

Brent laughs.

BRENT

Yeah right! As if. He is going to
teach me how to play football so I
can throw a football over the roof
one day.

SARAH

The roof is so big! That's
impossible.

BRENT

Yeah?!

EXT. CAR - CONTINUOUS

The car continues towards Mansfield Hall.

A rabbit hops onto the road, looks directly at the car.
The car speeds up, the rabbit disappears under it.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Brent and Clare stand up. They shout at each other.

BRENT
Man!

SARAH
Woman!

BRENT
Man!

SARAH
Woman!

A knock at the door. Everyone goes silent.

BRENT
Man!

Everyone looks at Brent. He lowers his head and sits down.

SARAH
(whispers)
Woman!

A door is opened O.S.

The children stare at the door with anticipation.

Uncle Brian walks into the room. He clears his throat.

UNCLE BRIAN
Children, let me introduce you to
your new caretaker... Miss
Bertrus...

MISS BERTRUS, 40, broad shoulders, hair tied tightly back,
muscular, four feet high, enters the room.

She scans the room, arms crossed, with a scowl on her face.

CLARE, 24, blonde, tall, nerdy, glasses comes through the
door, struggling to pull suitcases.

UNCLE BRIAN (CONT'D)
Please make her, and her assistant
Clare feel welcome.

Pause. The children blankly stare at Miss Bertrus. Uncle
Brian clears his throat.

The children start to clap. Miss Bertrus nods, and spins around. She clicks her fingers, and walks out of the room.

Clare follows her with the suitcases.

The room goes silent.

SARAH

Was it... is it... ?

Brent shrugs.

The children look at Brian.

Pause.

Brian nods to Trad.

Trad shakes his head.

A car horn is heard outside.

All the children except for Trad silently stand up, and hug Uncle Brian.

A tear falls down Uncle Brian's cheek as he holds them tight. He wipes it away with his sleeve.

Suz quietly sobs.

UNCLE BRIAN

(whispering)

We will be back for Christmas in
two weeks. Don't worry, don't cry,
we will see you soon.

Suz sniffs. She wipes away tears. She stops crying.

The horn outside sounds again.

Uncle Brian walks over to Trad, grabs his hand. Trad shakes his head. Uncle Brian pulls Trad away.

Elkie cries. She holds Trad's hand.

Uncle Brian pulls Trad away from Elkie. They walk out the front door. Uncle Brian closes it behind him.

Elkie runs to the window. She observes Uncle Brian and a reluctant Trad getting in the Taxi.

The taxi drives off. Trad turns around and makes eye contact with a tearful Elkie.

EXT. WOODLANDS - DAY

Rope slides against rope.

JT, 14, strong build, scraggly hair, holds the rope - he whizzes through the air. He slides to the ground.

JT stokes a fire.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, DORMITORY - MORNING

The children lay in bed. Still and dark.

Suddenly a loud alarm sounds. The children sit up.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, KITCHEN

The orphans stand behind chairs at the table. The chairs face outwards. Miss Bertrus stands opposite them. She is shorter than most of the children.

MISS BERTRUS

You may ask yourself why you are up so early. The answer is simple - to learn. To learn discipline and punctuality.

(beat)

Hello. My name is Miss Bertrus, your new boss.

Brent glances at Elkie.

Elkie shrugs.

MISS BERTRUS (CONT'D)

You will address me as Miss Bertrus and nothing else. I will be in charge here from now on and you will do everything I tell you to do. Any questions?

Elkie puts her hand up.

MISS BERTRUS (CONT'D)

No? Good.

(beat)

Now, lesson one has begun.

"Determination." There will be twelve lessons, one a day, for the twelve days left before Christmas. They are called the twelve lessons of Christmas. By Christmas you will be better children.

(beat)

Determination. How hungry are you, really? We will soon find out.

(beat)

(MORE)

MISS BERTRUS (CONT'D)

On the table are six bowls of freshly cooked, lovely, steaming, beautiful porridge. There are 12 of you. Today, only six will eat.

Miss Bertrus turns to Clare, who holds a guitar.

MISS BERTRUS (CONT'D)

When the music stops, find a chair and sit down. I will keep on taking a chair away until six are left. Those six left will eat, the others will go hungry.

(beat)

Clare, take it away.

Clare immediately starts to strum the guitar. The children stand there.

Miss Bertrus sighs and brings out a whistle. Blows it.

The children suddenly jump to it - start to walk around the table.

Clare really gets into it . . . And suddenly stops.

The children scabble for a seat.

One of the children does not end up with a seat.

Miss Bertrus shrugs, as she smiles.

MISS BERTRUS (CONT'D)

No breakfast for you!

The child hangs his head - walks out of the room.

Clare starts up again on the drums. She brings a harmonica hanging around her neck to her mouth - starts to play.

Miss Bertrus takes a chair away.

Clare now plays the drum kit at her feet, as well as the guitar and harmonica.

The children walk around the table.

Clare is really involved in the music.

The children continue to walk around the table. The music suddenly stops.

SMASH CUT:

EXT. TREEHOUSE - LATER

Elkie, Suz, Sarah and Brent sit quietly.

Brent moans.

BRENT

Hungry. I'm so hungry. I've never gone without breakfast... who does she think she is? Twelve lessons...

SUZ

Uncle Brian never did that.

Pause.

SARAH

The music was cool though.

The others nod.

EXT. FIELD - MORNING

Miss Bertrus stands before the children.

MISS BERTRUS

"Competitive spirit". What's it feel like to win? What's it feel like to lose? To be successful in life you have to win. This will teach you to be competitive.

The children shiver in the morning cold.

MISS BERTRUS (CONT'D)

Twenty laps around the hall. The person who comes last -

Miss Bertrus pauses for dramatic effect.

MISS BERTRUS (CONT'D)

- Has to do fifty more, before the day is over.

An obese child, JAMES, 12, looks shocked. He whispers to Suz, who stands next to him.

JAMES

I haven't even walked fast in years!

Miss Bertrus points a gun to the sky.

BRENT

Is that real Miss?

MISS BERTRUS

From my own personal collection, boy. Has a real bang to it.

(beat)

Ready, set, go!

Miss Bertrus shoots the gun, the sound is deafening.
The children rub their ears and start to run around the hall.

ELKIE (V.O.)
You can guess what happened after
that.

EXT. MANSFIELD HALL

The children run down the side of the hall.
James lies on a bench, breathing heavily.

BRENT
Come on man, it's only the second
lap.

James shakes his head.

JAMES
I can't... I physically can't.

BRENT
Yeah, well I don't want to either,
but -

JAMES
You don't understand, I can't!

Brent shrugs and runs off.

ELKIE (V.O.)
James did what Miss Bertrus wanted -
Suz calls her Miss Beetroot, not to
her face though, it's funny -
because he was scared of what she
was really capable of. No one knew.

EXT. MANSFIELD HALL - NIGHT

A dead tired James pushes himself - struggles to stand as he
turns around a corner of the hall.

ELKIE (V.O.)
But over 14 hours he did it. We
were so proud of him.

EXT. TREEHOUSE - DAY

ELKIE
What we gonna do about it?

BRENT

What do you mean "do"? What can we do! Nothing. She's our "boss" now.

Elkie stands up.

ELKIE

We can stand up to her. Tell her we don't like the way she treats us. She will change, be nicer. She has to.

BRENT

As if Elkie. Why would she suddenly just be nice?

ELKIE

Well it's just an idea, I just want Brian back okay!

BRENT

Yeah right, you just want to see your boyfriend Trad -

ELKIE

He's not my boyfriend! I don't even have a boyfriend! Shut up Brent!

BRENT

Whatever, you love him, I know you do -

SUZ

Guys, stop it! Stop fighting! What we have to do is we have to make her leave, so Uncle Brian can come back.

(beat)

I have an idea.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, DORMITORY - NIGHT

All is dark and silent. Brent steps out of bed. Touches Elkie, who sleeps next to him.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, HALLWAY

Elkie, Brent and Suz sneak out of the door and into the hallway.

They pass a slightly open door and peer in.

Clare dances in front of a mirror wearing earphones.

Brent taps on the door - Clare continues to dance, she mouths the words.

Brent taps a bit louder, Clare notices and immediately stops dancing.

Clare rushes over to them.

CLARE
(whispering)
What are you doing here!? What if Miss Bertrus caught you?! Go back to bed!

ELKIE
(whispering)
We need to talk to you.

Clare glances down the hall. Silent and empty.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, CLARE'S ROOM

Clare sits on her bed. The children sit on the floor.

CLARE
Guys, be quick, you can't get caught out of bed.

BRENT
Do you... do you like Miss Bertrus?

CLARE
Well, of course I do. Why wouldn't I?

ELKIE
Oh no reason! We love her too.

SUZ
We were just wondering... does she have a weakness?

CLARE
A what? Why?

BRENT
We just want to help her... that's all.

CLARE
Well no. She's the perfect specimen. No weaknesses in the slightest.

SUZ
Sure?

Pause.

CLARE
Well, there is one thing...

The children lean in close to Clare.

CLARE (CONT'D)
But don't tell her I mentioned
this.

The children nod.

CLARE (CONT'D)
(whispering)
She's allergic to cats.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, BERTRUS' ROOM

A snoring Miss Bertrus lies in bed.

She suddenly stops snoring.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, CLARE'S ROOM

BRENT
Cats? How can you be allergic to
cats? Cats are cute and cuddly.

CLARE
I've heard that when she's around
them she goes all puffy and blows
up into a big ball.

Clare puffs out her cheeks and giggles.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, BERTRUS' ROOM

Miss Bertrus sits on the side of her bed.

She stands up and walks towards the door.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, CLARE'S ROOM

The children laugh at Clare imitating Miss Bertrus.

They hear a door open O.S.

Clare stops imitating.

CLARE
You must leave, now! Go back to
your room, go!

Brent, Suz and Elkie scuttle out of the room.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, HALLWAY

Miss Bertrus walks down the hallway like a zombie, her sleeping eye mask over her eyes.

She passes Suz, Brent and Elkie as they cling, frozen, to the wall.

Seconds pass, and Miss Bertrus walks around the corner of the hallway.

The children relax, and start to breath again.

ELKIE
(whispering)
That was close.

Elkie walks down the hallway away from Miss Bertrus.

SUZ
(whispering)
Where are you going?

ELKIE
(whispering)
Back to bed silly, what do you think?

SUZ
(whispering)
No way, lets go see what she's doing.

BRENT
What? If we got caught we would be in so much trouble! Come on, lets just go back to sleep.

SUZ
Fine, I'll go myself then.

Fine. BRENT ELKIE Fine.

Brent and Elkie walk off. Suz shrugs and walks the other way.

Brent and Elkie stop. They share a look - turn around and follow Suz.

There is noise O.S. from the kitchen.

The children approach the end of the hallway - poke their heads into the

KITCHEN

Miss Bertrus stands at the stove, her sleeping mask still over her eyes. Mixing bowls are on the bench, pots and pans are on the stove.

Food is everywhere.

Miss Bertrus works surprisingly quickly as she slices, dices and fries various meats, fruit and vegetables.

The children stare in shock and awe.

BRENT
(whispering)
What's she doing?!

ELKIE
Sleep cooking.

Miss Bertrus takes a huge steak out of a pan.

She suddenly stabs it with a huge fork, and stuffs it in her mouth.

SUZ
And sleep eating too!

BRENT
No wonder she's so fat.

Suz giggles.

ELKIE
Shhh, she will wake up.

Miss Bertrus adds cans of food to a big pot. She stirs it, sticks her finger in, tastes the contents. She adds salt.

SUZ
You guys hungry?

Suz moves towards Miss Bertrus.

ELKIE
(whispering)
What?! No! Don't!

Suz motions to her to be quiet.

She creeps up towards the cooking bench.

Miss Bertrus works away, unaware of Suz.

BRENT
(whispering)
Seriously Suz, just come back!

Suz reaches the bench. She reaches hand onto the bench, feels around.

Suddenly she finds what she is looking for - grabs it, pulls her arm back.

Suz scampers away from the bench, back to Brent and Elkie.

They run off down the

HALLWAY

They stop, Suz brings out what she took - a big block of chocolate.

Brent and Elkie grin. They all rip at the foil around the chocolate.

FADE OUT.

EXT. WOODLANDS - DAY

JT holds a spear above his head - he slinks through the undergrowth. He sniffs the air - changes direction.

He hears something - moves faster - turns into a fast jog, then a sprint.

He quickly makes his way through the undergrowth. He dodges bushes and fallen trees.

He spies movement, comes around a corner, raises his spear to strike - Elkie stands there, petrified.

JT lowers his spear. He breaths heavily. A rustle is heard nearby, a animal runs off. JT shakes his head.

JT
(to Elkie)
Thanks a lot, that was my dinner
for the next week, you know.

ELKIE
I'm sorry, I didn't mean to startle
you.

JT
Fine, it's fine.
(beat)
What are you doing here?

ELKIE (V.O.)
That's JT. He's hell smart.

ELKIE (CONT'D)
We need some help.

JT
We?

ELKIE

Me... I... I need some help.

JT

Is Brent here?

Elkie shakes her head.

JT (CONT'D)

Good.

(beat)

What's up?

ELKIE

Can you get hold of a cat by any chance?

JT

A cat, you say. Hmmm, it's possible, yes.

ELKIE

It would have to be alive.

JT

Alive?! Geez, that's a challenge. I usually just kill animals.

Pause.

JT (CONT'D)

You going to help me out with my dinner you foolishly scared away?

Elkie brings out a sandwich from her backpack.

JT grabs it, starts to munch it down.

ELKIE

That was supposed to be for dinner!

JT

I'm hungry. Plus my sleeping patterns are all jumbled up -

(beat)

Hey, how's my stupid brother?

ELKIE (V.O.)

Brent and JT are brothers. They argued two years ago about who were their real parents, and JT ran off to live here.

ELKIE (CONT'D)

He's good. You going to come back and say hi to him? He misses you.

JT

Bulldust he misses me. Tell him I don't miss him, okay?

ELKIE

Okay. But if you change your mind, you are always welcome.

JT

I know, you've told me like a million times.

ELKIE

Yeah well I'm serious. We have another lady in charge. Uncle Brian left with Trad.

JT stops chewing.

JT

What?! Is the new man cool?

ELKIE

It's a woman. And no, she's not cool. That's why we need the cat.

JT nods.

JT

Say no more, Mum's the word, and all that.

Elkie hugs JT.

JT (CONT'D)

Give me 24 hours, okay?

Elkie nods.

ELKIE

I'll be back here in 24 hours.

EXT. TRAD'S HOUSE - DAY

A house sits in a reasonably expensive area.

A low fence is out the front, as is a well kept garden.

INT. TRAD'S HOUSE - DAY

Trad sits at a table, paper in front of him.

He draws Mansfield Hall.

A BANG against the side of the house. Trad looks up.

TRAD
Grandfather? Was that you?

No answer.

Trad stands up, walks to the door.

EXT. TRAD'S GARDEN

Trad looks outside. No one there.

A cricket ball lays beside his house. He picks it up.

Trad walks down the path to the road - bumps into a group of CHILDREN outside his house.

ANDY, 14, stands at the front.

ANDY
Do you have our ball?

Trad holds the ball out. Andy grabs it.

ANDY (CONT'D)
Thanks.

Trad turns -

ANDY (CONT'D)
Wanna play? You can't bat, I'm
batting. But you can field.
(beat)
If you want.

Trad pauses, unsure.

ANDY (CONT'D)
Come on, it'll be fun.

Trad smiles, walks towards the group.

EXT. ROAD - LATER

Trad runs, faster and faster. The other boys clap, cheer, he bowls the ball, TYSON, 15, hits it. The ball flies through the air.

MONTAGE:

1. Trad bowls again. The ball goes straight through Tyson's legs, into the wickets.
2. Trad is now batting. He hits the ball.
3. Andy packs up the gear. He motions to Trad, asking him if he wants to go with him.

After hesitation and a glance at his house, he agrees.

4. Andy, Tyron and Trad walk into a huge mansion.

END MONTAGE.

INT. MANSION - DAY

Trad stands in awe at the huge stairwell directly in front of him.

ANDY
(shouting)
Mum, we're home...

TRAD
This place is amazing.

Andy shrugs.

ANDY
It's a place to sleep.
(beat)
Tyron, what you wanna do?

TYRON
Hit up the Wii?

ANDY
(to Trad)
Wanna play some Wii?

TRAD
I'm fine, I went before...

Andy smiles.

ANDY
The game console.

TRAD
Oh! Umm, I haven't played it
before, but yeah...

ANDY
Coolness.

INT. MANSION, GAMES ROOM

Andy and Tyron play tennis on the Wii. The television is huge, lines of couches fill most of the room.

Old school arcade games line both walls.

Trad stands in awe.

Andy and Tyron do fake tennis moans and groans.

On screen Andy wins the match.

TYRON

Oh, you poo.

ANDY

Every time! Too good!

Tyron hands the controller to Trad.

TYRON

Your go, bro.

Trad grabs it.

TRAD

I think I have the hang of it,
seeing how you guys do it.

ANDY

I'm a pro at this. Practise 2 hours
a day, every day. You cannot beat
me.

(beat)

It will still be fun though!

Andy smiles. Trad laughs nervously.

The game starts up. Andy serves. Trad swings the controller,
it slips through his hands - smashes into the cinema sized
television.

Pause. Trad looks shocked.

TRAD

Oh my gosh, I'm so sorry! I didn't
mean to, it just slipped...

Andy puts down his controller, rolls up his sleeves. He turns
to Trad.

TRAD (CONT'D)

I said I'm sorry! Look, I'll get my
grandfather to buy you a new one or
something...

Andy advances slowly on Trad.

Tyron's arms suddenly wrap around Trad's chest.

Andy is now right next to Trad.

Tears fall down Trad's face.

Andy brings his face right next to Trad's.

Andy and Tyron suddenly burst out in laughter. Tyron lets Trad go.

TRAD (CONT'D)
What? I don't understand. What about... The TV?

TYRON
You always do that Andy, so mean!

ANDY
Don't worry about the TV, Mum will just get a new one.

Andy and Tyron burst out with laughter again.

Andy points to Trad.

ANDY (CONT'D)
The look on your face! Classic!

TYRON
It's just a joke he likes to play on people who have never played the Wii before. Don't worry about it.

Trad seems relieved but annoyed.

ANDY
You are supposed to put the wrist strap on.

Trad nods.

ANDY (CONT'D)
Oh boy, funny stuff. Anyway, I'm hungry. You hungry?

TRAD
Well -

ANDY
(shouting)
Muum!

INT. MANSION, DINING ROOM - LATER

A huge table, laid out with numerous puddings, slices, pies, cakes and biscuits.

Andy, Trad and Tyron eat.

ANDY'S MOTHER, 45, normal build, blonde, dusts.

ANDY'S MOTHER

You're very welcome to stay for dinner Trad, we are having roast duck.

TRAD

Uh, I would love to, but my grandfather is expecting me home for dinner. So I better not.

ANDY'S MOTHER

Oh, you live with your grandfather and grandmother?

TRAD

Just Grandfather.

Pause.

ANDY

Is the other one dead?

ANDY'S MOTHER

Andrew! Please!

ANDY

Just asking!

Pause.

TRAD

Well, yeah, she is.

ANDY'S MOTHER

Oh, I'm sorry Trad, Andy didn't know.

ANDY

Sorry.

TRAD

That's okay. I don't mind anymore, I never even met her.

(beat)

Or my parents.

Andy's Mother scuttles over to Trad - hugs him.

ANDY'S MOTHER

I'm so sorry dear. That must be hard.

TRAD

Well not really. Like, I wish I had met them and stuff. But it's not too bad.

Andy's Mother kisses Trad on the cheek.

ANDY

Mum!

ANDY'S MOTHER

It's fine dear! Trad doesn't mind,
do you Trad?

TRAD

Umm, na, it's fine.

Pause.

TYRON

(whispers to Andy)

Ask your Mum about the thing.

Andy nods.

ANDY

Mum, can Trad come with us tomorrow
Wet 'N' Wild please?

ANDY'S MOTHER

Of course!

TRAD

What's Wet 'N' Wild?

TYRON

It's the best thing ever!

ANDY

There's rollar coasters and slides
and animals!

TYRON

Rides and food and people
everywhere!

A huge grin is plastered across Trad's face.

It suddenly disappears.

TRAD

But if it's called Wet 'N' Wild...
shouldn't there be... You know...

(beat)

Water?

SMASH CUT:

EXT. WET 'N' WILD - THE NEXT DAY

MONTAGE:

1. Trad slides down a huge water slide. He screams and
squeals.

He flies off into the air... hangs there for what seems like seconds...

SPLASH. Trad lands in the water.

Trad becomes eloped by the water, as he slowly sinks.

The surface of the water becomes calm.

Seconds pass...

Suddenly Trad explodes on the surface, a huge grin plastered across his face.

TRAD

Awesome!

2. Trad, Tyron and Andy sit together in a giant doughnut as they speed down a slide.

3. Andy flies down a huge pipe - splashes into the water.

END MONTAGE.

Trad, Andy and Tyron sit in a spa.

They drink coke.

TRAD (CONT'D)

This... is awesome.

Tyron smiles.

TYRON

We knew you would like it.

ANDY

So much fun, isn't it? We do this like every two weeks. Disney World is good too, but we like the water.

Trad smiles.

TRAD

I've never had friends like you before. Real friends.

Pause.

ANDY

First one to the beach sits in the front seat!

Andy jumps out of the spa.

Tyron and Trad follow.

INT. TRAD'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Uncle Brian reads the paper by the open fire.

The front door opens - Trad walks through.

Uncle Brian.

UNCLE BRIAN

Where have you been young man?

TRAD

Went to Wet 'n' Wild. Was sooo fun!

Uncle Brian smiles.

UNCLE BRIAN

I'm sure it was. I would just like to know where you are when it's this late.

TRAD

Yeah, sorry grandfather.

(beat)

I'm seeing them again tomorrow.

UNCLE BRIAN

Who is "them"?

TRAD

Andy and Tyron. My friends.

Uncle Brian turns to sit down.

UNCLE BRIAN

Just stay safe, that's all I ask.

No answer.

A scuffle is heard upstairs. Trad has disappeared.

Uncle Brian sighs.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, DORMITORY

A cardboard box lays at the end of each of the children's bed.

The box at the end of Sarah's bed starts to move.

Sarah wakes up, gasps.

The box moves a bit more. The lid is pushed up.

Sarah backs to the wall.

A head of a puppy appears from the box.

Sarah squeals with joy, and grabs the puppy.

SARAH
(shouting)
Everyone wake up! I have a little
doggy! A real life dog!

The others start to wake up.

They each look in the box at the end of their beds. They each
have a small puppy.

Brent opens his box up - a frog sits at the bottom of his.

BRENT
Oh man! I didn't get any doggy. I
got this frog thing.

Brent picks up the frog, stares at it.

The frog stares straight back at Brent.

It croaks. Brent yelps and drops it back in the box.

Elkie holds a puppy in her arms. The puppy licks her face.

ELKIE
You can share mine Brent, he's very
friendly.

MISS BERTRUS
There will be no sharing of
animals.

Miss Bertrus stands at the door.

MISS BERTRUS (CONT'D)
Lesson number three. "Self
control". You need to be able to
control your emotions. Love is an
emotion. You will not love your
animals.

Miss Bertrus walks up to the other end of the room.

MISS BERTRUS (CONT'D)
You will not smile, pat or hold
your animals from now on. You will
definitely not let your animal lick
you.

Miss Bertrus glances at Elkie - shakes her head.

MISS BERTRUS (CONT'D)
Your animal will stay in its box.
If I see any positive emotions
towards your animal, YOU will stay
in a box for a day, is that clear?

The children nod. They each put their animal back in the boxes.

MISS BERTRUS (CONT'D)
Good. Clare will be keeping an eye
on you today.

Miss Bertrus walks to the door.

BRENT
What about mine?

MISS BERTRUS
(to Brent)
We ran out of dogs. Deal with it.

Brent huffs.

MISS BERTRUS (CONT'D)
No positive emotions, good child.

Miss Bertrus pats Brent on the head.

Miss Bertrus exits.

Brent ruffles his hair back the way it was.

Clare walks in the room.

James looks at his dog who sleeps in the box.

JAMES
Elkie, mine looks like you!

Clare points at her.

CLARE
In the box!

INT. BOX - MOMENTS LATER

A glum James sits at the bottom of a large cardboard box.

The other children peer down at him.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, DINING ROOM

The children sit and stare into their boxes.

ELKIE
Oh my gosh, mine just sneezed!

Elkie glances at Clare. Clare looks back at her, sternly.

ELKIE (CONT'D)

- Which does not make me feel any positive emotions in the slightest.

Clare nods, looks away.

SUZ

I'm going to call mine Trevor. And he was born, and has 23 other brothers and sisters. And his favourite colour is yellow, and he thinks vegetables taste yucky.

Brent peers into his box.

BRENT

Mine's not moving. I think it might be dead.

(beat)

Stupid frog.

Brent picks up his box - shakes it.

The frog makes a noise - Brent drops the box in fright.

SUZ

Maybe it was just sleeping for a bit. Probably tired. You make people tired.

Suz points her tongue out at Brent.

BRENT

Shut up Suz! Stop being mean to me, I didn't get a puppy like you.

Brent walks over to Elkie's box - peers inside.

BRENT (CONT'D)

I think my frog and your dog should have a fight. Mine would win!

CLARE (O.S.)

In the box!

BRENT

Oh man!

INT. BOX - MOMENTS LATER

Brent sits in the box next to James.

BRENT

(to James)

So. What's news?

James blankly stares at Brent.

FADE OUT.

EXT. WOODLANDS - MORNING

Elkie looks around, waiting. Pause.

JT comes from behind a bush.

JT

Hey.

ELKIE

Hey. Got the cat?

JT

I tried. But they are hard to catch.

Elkie sighs.

ELKIE

That's okay. Have you tried using food? That could catch them maybe.

JT

I can't even catch my breakfast, let alone a cat for you.

ELKIE

Okay well I can't stay long because I shouldn't even be here. But meet back here tomorrow?

JT

Tomorrow I will have the cat for you, no worries.

ELKIE

Okay cool, thanks.

(beat)

We are having hamburgers for dinner. If you want to come.

JT's face lights up.

Pause.

He shakes his head.

JT

Thanks, but I'll pass. I have... stuff to do tonight.

Elkie sighs.

ELKIE
Okay. But you are always welcome.

JT
I know.
(beat)
Thanks.

FADE OUT.

INT. TREEHOUSE - LATER

Elkie sits, her back against a tree.

Brent's head appears in the doorway. He climbs up the rope and stands in the treehouse.

BRENT
Watcha doin'?

ELKIE
Nothing.

Pause.

Brent sits down next to Elkie.

ELKIE (CONT'D)
Just thinking.

BRENT
About?

ELKIE
Trent. And Uncle Brian. And who my
real parents are.

Brent nods.

Pause.

ELKIE (CONT'D)
What are you thinking about?

BRENT
Nothin'.

Pause.

ELKIE
I saw JT before.

BRENT
Don't talk about him, he doesn't
know anything.

ELKIE

He said he will get a cat for us.

BRENT

Whatever. He always says stuff then doesn't do it. So, whatever.

Pause.

ELKIE

Why do you hate him so much?

Brent looks at Elkie.

BRENT

Because he kept on going on about Mum and Dad, and it doesn't even matter who or where they are.

ELKIE

Yeah, but it's still okay to talk about it.

BRENT

What's the point though?

ELKIE

I dunno, to make you feel better?

BRENT

It's not making me feel anything. They aren't here now, so who cares.

ELKIE

Don't speak like that. What if they came here right now -

Brent stands up.

BRENT

Look Elkie, I'm here, without parents for a reason, okay? When I was born they didn't like me, or something, and now I'm here. What am I supposed to do?!

ELKIE

Brent -

BRENT

At least you know that your parents are dead.

Pause.

Brent looks shocked.

Elkie begins to cry.

Brent rushes over and hugs Elkie.

BRENT (CONT'D)

I didn't mean that... I'm so sorry Elkie. Please, I'm sorry. It just came out.

ELKIE

I would give anything to see my parents. At least you might be able to see yours again!

Elkie jumps up, heads to the exit.

Brent slumps, sighs.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, DINING ROOM

The children eat.

Miss Bertrus stands at the end of the table.

MISS BERTRUS

Today will be a day of learning. Clare will be teaching you maths and I will be teaching English.

The children continue to eat.

MISS BERTRUS (CONT'D)

Also, today's lesson is that "silence is golden". In your breakfast I have added a liquid which will make you feel ill... if you talk.

Brent coughs up a mouthful of cereal.

BRENT

Are you serious?

MISS BERTRUS

Deadly, child. It incorporates movement of the voice box. You will be feeling quite ill in a matter of minutes.

The children place their spoons down - stop eating.

MISS BERTRUS (CONT'D)

It is important to use other ways to communicate other than talking. This exercise will help you to do this.

Brent moans - holds his stomach.

BRENT
Actually, I am feeling a bit
sick...

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, STUDY ROOM - LATER

The children sit at desks. They draw on paper.

Clare stands up the front. She draws on a whiteboard.

Sarah writes on a scrap of paper, passes it to Elkie.

Elkie reads it - "When are you getting the cat?"

Elkie writes on a bit of paper, hands it to Sarah - "How do you know about that!"

Sarah cringes. She writes back to Elkie - "Oops!"

Sarah points to Brent.

Elkie rolls her eyes.

EXT. WOODLANDS - NEXT DAY

Elkie walks with JT.

Elkie holds a small cage.

JT
Has Brent said much about mum and
dad?

ELKIE
Umm, well, he said that he misses
them. And, that he misses you too.

JT scoffs. Pause.

JT
Really?

Pause. Elkie nods.

JT (CONT'D)
What's the new lady like?

ELKIE
Terrible. We all don't like her.
She tries to teach us stuff, but
it's always stupid stuff anyway.

Pause.

ELKIE (CONT'D)
Can you come? Please?

JT
What? Where?

ELKIE
To the hall. So you can see what
this lady is really like.

JT
I dunno. I told you before I
wouldn't.

ELKIE
Yeah, but that was before.

JT looks away.

JT
I got to make a fire before it gets
dark. See you later.

Elkie sighs.

JT jogs off.

ELKIE
You won't come but you should.

Elkie looks at the cage she is carrying.

ELKIE (CONT'D)
Hello kitty.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, LAUNDRY - NIGHT

The door opens, Elkie enters.

ELKIE
Hey kitty kitty kitty. Lets have
some fun.

A "meow" is heard O.S. and a cat comes out of the darkness to
Elkie.

Elkie picks it up.

ELKIE (CONT'D)
Good kitty.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, HALLWAY

Elkie creeps down the hallway, cat in hand.

She reaches Miss Bertrus' room - puts her ear up against the
door. Snoring.

Elkie grabs the handle with her free hand, turns it very slowly.

It creaks. She stops. Listens again. Still snoring.

She turns the handle a bit more, the door clicks open.

ELKIE
(to the cat)
Do me proud kitty.

Elkie drops the cat in Miss Bertrus' room. She slowly closes the door.

Elkie scuttles off down the hallway.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, BERTRUS' ROOM

Miss Bertrus lies on her back - her face mask over her eyes.

The cat walks towards the bed - jumps up on it.

The cat walks up to the top of the bed next to Miss Bertrus' face. It curls up in a ball by her head.

Miss Bertrus suddenly sneezes.

The cat starts to lick Miss Bertrus' cheek.

Miss Bertrus sneezes again.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, DORMITORY

Elkie sits on her bed with Suz and Brent.

ELKIE
(whispering)
Any minute now...

Suz and Brent smile.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, BERTRUS' ROOM

The cat continues to lick Miss Bertrus' face.

Miss Bertrus again sneezes... and sits up.

She rips her eye mask from her face, looks at the cat, and screams.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, DORMITORY

Elkie, Brent and Suz jump up, head towards the door.

They poke their heads into the hallway to the sight of Miss Bertrus closing the door to her room, locking the cat inside.

In the

HALLWAY

Miss Bertrus breathes heavily. She sneezes again.

Suddenly she looks up at the children. Her whole face becomes plumper.

Miss Bertrus points her finger towards the children.

MISS BERTRUS

You!

Miss Bertrus starts to run towards the children, but finds it hard as she is rapidly expanding. Her arms and legs get bigger and bigger as her nightgown stretches.

Suz screams, and closes the door.

Brent holds the door handle from the inside of the dormitory.

Miss Bertrus charges down the hallway. She reaches the door to the dormitory, but due to momentum and her newly plump body, she continues down the hall.

Miss Bertrus bounces off the walls until she reaches the stairs.

Miss Bertrus stops herself just before she tumbles down the stairs. She holds onto the railing for balance.

She breathes heavily - looks with menace at the dormitory door.

Miss Bertrus takes a step back down the hallway, but her foot catches on a bit of loose carpet.

She loses her balance, and tumbles down the stairs, screeching all the way.

Miss Bertrus lies at the bottom of the

STAIRS.

Suz, Elkie and Brent stand at the top of the stairs.

SUZ

Are you okay Miss?

Miss Bertrus raises her head to look at the children.

She growls - slumps her head back to the floor.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, BERTRUS' ROOM

A slightly less plumper Miss Bertrus lies on her bed. The bed sheets are a different colour.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, BASEMENT

A dark room.

Brent, Elkie and Suz sit beside each other. The only light in the room slowly swings above their heads.

Clare's face suddenly comes from the darkness.

All dialogue is purposeful and stylised.

CLARE
Who was it?

BRENT
It was not I.

SUZ
Nor me.

ELKIE
I did not do the deed.

CLARE
The evidence is stacked against you.

BRENT
You have nothing on us!

CLARE
You will be going straight to prison.

SUZ
Would like to see you try and send us there.

ELKIE
Bring it on.

CLARE
Oh, it's been brought...

Clare picks up a stack of papers from the table.

Her speech goes back to being more natural.

CLARE (CONT'D)
And then the band start, and I sing
-
(singing)
(MORE)

CLARE (CONT'D)

You're in big trouble my
friends/Because I saw you steal
that bread/Straight to jail for all
of you/With only a plank of wood to
rest your head.

Elkie claps.

Clare smiles.

BRENT

Can we get some light in here?

Clare walks over and flicks a switch. The room lights up.
It's full of old boxes.

SUZ

When's it on?

CLARE

Christmas day. I hope Miss Bertrus
lets me go to it. It's raising
money for charity.

Brent stands up - stretches.

CLARE (CONT'D)

Thanks for your help guys.

(beat)

Oh, you didn't put the cat in Miss
Bertrus' room, did you?

SUZ/ELKIE/BRENT

Nope!

CLARE

Thought so, just had to ask though.

ELKIE (V.O.)

Miss Bertrus didn't do anything
about the cat thing... she didn't
want to tell everyone she was
allergic. But it didn't make things
better, she didn't leave.

EXT. MANSFIELD HALL - DAY

Brent and Suz kick a soccer ball to each other.

BRENT

What do you think she's gonna do
next?

ELKIE (V.O.)

It just got worse...

CUT TO:

MONTAGE:

1.

MISS BERTRUS
Lesson five, "courage".

Miss Bertrus stands on the bank of a river. The children are next to her.

Elkie flies over the river on a flying fox. She lands on the bank on the other side.

Suz flies over the other side on the flying fox... but doesn't land. She returns to the original bank and high fives Brent. She flies back again to the second bank, jumps, and lands.

Brent holds the rope. He shakes his head at Miss Bertrus.

Miss Bertrus nods to him.

He shakes his head again.

Miss Bertrus pushes him.

Brent reaches half way across the river. His hands slip from the rope and he makes a huge splash when he reaches the water below.

2.

MISS BERTRUS (CONT'D)
"Strength."

The children carry rocks from a huge pile to a small pile.

Miss Bertrus sits on a chair and watches.

Clare rushes to her side holding an iced drink.

Miss Bertrus sniffs the drink, shakes her head and hands it back to Clare.

3.

MISS BERTRUS (CONT'D)
"Creativity."

Clare holds a silly pose.

The children paint her on a canvas each.

Miss Bertrus walks past each canvas holding a samurai sword.

She reaches James' canvas - slashes it with the sword.

James sighs, picks up another blank canvas on the ground, places it on the stand.

SLASH SLASH SLASH.

Clare struggles to hold her pose.

4.

MISS BERTRUS (CONT'D)
"Patients".

Clare puts an "Out of order" sign on the bathroom door.

The children look on.

Suz jumps around, her legs together - she needs to pee.

5.

MISS BERTRUS (CONT'D)
"Commitment".

Cans of paint and paint brushes are put in hands.

The children stand outside of Mansfield Hall - look in awe at it's size.

6.

MISS BERTRUS (CONT'D)
"Agility".

The children are nearly at the top of a large oak tree they climb.

Sarah slips, Suz grabs her hand, pulls her up.

7.

MISS BERTRUS (CONT'D)
"Good deeds".

The children are in the process of cleaning a large dog.

The OWNER holds its lead as they soap the dog up.

Elkie looks down the line of dogs and OWNERS which trails around the corner and sighs.

END MONTAGE.

FADE OUT.

INT. TREEHOUSE - DAY

Elkie leans against a tree.

Suz sits next to her

SUZ

What if we steal all her clothes.
Then when she gets up in the
morning to put on clothes, she will
have none!

ELKIE

That won't make her leave.

BRENT

We need to find something she
really likes... and take it away
from her.

SUZ

Who doesn't like clothes?!

BRENT

Something more than that. Something
to really push her over the edge.

SUZ

I think we nearly got her with the
cat. So close, she was pissed!

BRENT

It just wasn't enough though. We
need a touch more...

Pause.

ELKIE

I got it! What does Miss Bertrus
like doing the most in the world,
but doesn't know about it?

Suz and Brent smile.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, HALLWAY

Miss Bertrus walks like a zombie down the hallway.

Brent whispers into walkie talkie.

BRENT

We have movement, I repeat, we have
movement.

(beat)

Get out of there, now!

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Elkie listens to Brent via her walkie talkie.

She taps Suz, who has her head in the fridge.

ELKIE
We gotta go, she's coming.

SUZ
One last thing -

ELKIE
No, now! Do you want to be here
when it goes down?!

Suz closes the door to the fridge.

SUZ
Yes I do!

Miss Bertrus enters the kitchen.

Suz and Elkie move on all fours under the kitchen table.

ELKIE
(into walkie talkie)
She is in the kitchen, repeat, she
is in the kitchen.

Miss Bertrus walks to behind the bench. She brings out a
mixing bowl, flour, sugar and a wooden spoon.

The fridge opens and Miss Bertrus grabs eggs, butter and
milk.

SUZ
She's going for the cake! You
beauty!

ELKIE
Shh!

Miss Bertrus works quickly, as she mixes butter with sugar.

SUZ
There we have a lovely slab of
butter mixed with salt, now that's
a bit different!

Miss Bertrus adds three eggs to the bowl.

SUZ (CONT'D)
And three rotten eggs to the mix,
that one might come back to bite
her in the bum later.

Miss Bertrus adds flour and milk to the bowl.

SUZ (CONT'D)
Some fine sawdust and some off
milk, now that is creative!

Miss Bertrus mixes the contents of the bowl. She grabs the spoon, takes a lick.

ELKIE
(into walkie talkie)
Going for the lick in three, two,
one...

Suz looks from under the table in anticipation.

Brent pokes his head around the door, looks at Miss Bertrus.

Miss Bertrus licks the spoon.

Pause.

EXT. MANSFIELD HALL

Miss Bertrus screams O.S.

FADE OUT.

EXT. MANSFIELD HALL

The side of the hall is mostly painted.

The children stand at the wall - they paint.

ELKIE (V.O.)
Miss Bertrus woke up in shock last
night while she was sleep cooking.
She never knew she was doing it,
until the sawdust hit her lips. But
she just got stricter, she didn't
leave.

SUZ
It's so hot.

No response.

SUZ (CONT'D)
I think I might die.

Still no response.

SUZ (CONT'D)
I really can't be bothered -

BRENT
Shut up Suz! We get it, you are hot
and tired!

Suz brushes Brent with the paintbrush.

Brent smiles.

BRENT (CONT'D)
Oh, you just made a big mistake.

Elkie brushes Brent with paint.

BRENT (CONT'D)
Okay, both of you are dead...

Brent brushes Suz on the face, turns around and brushes Elkie across the neck.

Brent blows the top of the paintbrush as if it was smoke from a gun.

BRENT (CONT'D)
I'm the best painter in the land.

Elkie laughs - flicks paint at Brent.

Suz picks up a can of paint, throws the contents at Brent. It misses.

Soon most of the children laugh, throw paint and brush each other with paint.

Until Suz suddenly stops.

Her back to the wall, she looks past Brent, who faces her.

Brent, paintbrush raised, smiles at Suz.

BRENT (CONT'D)
What?

Suz points past Brent.

Brent turns around.

EXT. MANSFIELD HALLS

JT walks down the road towards Mansfield Hall, backpack in hand, as *everything slows down*.

Brent throws his paintbrush to the ground, begins to march towards JT.

Elkie sees JT and Brent, and runs to Brent - grabs him.

Brent pushes her off, continues to march towards JT.

As JT and Brent get closer, JT drops his backpack to the ground - pulls up his sleeves.

Brent and JT meet - Brent pushes JT in the chest. A passive JT puts up his hands.

Elkie grabs Brent again - Brent throws her to the ground.

Brent and JT shout at each other MOS.

Brent continues to push JT, until JT breaks, and pushes back.

Brent falls to the ground, JT jumps on him.

JT punches Brent in the face. Elkie and Suz grab JT, and pull him off Brent.

BILL, 48, tall, steps out of a car, as does SHARON, 46.

Bill speaks to James MOS.

James points to Brent and JT.

Bill and Sharon run towards Brent and JT.

JT escapes the hold of Elkie and Suz, and runs to Brent.

Brent begins to stand up, but is pushed back down by JT.

Bill and Sharon reach the group.

Bill pulls JT from Brent - hugs him. JT cries into Bill's chest.

Sharon falls to the ground - hugs Brent. Brent cries into Sharon.

Bill talks to JT MOS, Sharon talks to Brent MOS.

Realisation hits JT and Brent at the same time.

Sharon and Bill start to cry.

Brent shakes his head at Bill as tears fall down his face.

Bill talks MOS to Brent.

Brent stares at Bill - suddenly hugs him.

Brent and Sharon stand up - enter a group hug with Bill and JT.

ELKIE (V.O.)

It turned out that Brent and JT's parents had left them after they got divorced. But they had gotten back together in the last two months, and wanted to be a family again.

(beat)

Lets hope it stays that way.

Bill, Sharon, JT and Brent continue to hug.

FADE OUT.

EXT. MANSFIELD HALL

Back to normal time.

Bill drives the car down the driveway away from Mansfield Hall.

ELKIE (V.O.)
I would miss Brent. We all would.
But they said they would come
visit.

INT. TRAD'S HOUSE, KITCHEN - MORNING

Uncle Brian fries eggs on the stove.

Trad walks in the room. He wears a leather jacket.

UNCLE BRIAN
How well do you want your eggs -

Uncle Brian turns around.

UNCLE BRIAN (CONT'D)
- Where did you get that jacket?

TRAD
Andy's Mum bought it for me. Pretty
cool huh?

Trad flicks the collar up - poses.

UNCLE BRIAN
It's... different. I like it, I
suppose.

TRAD
Yeah, sweet gramps.

Uncle Brian chuckles nervously.

UNCLE BRIAN
You've never called my "gramps"
before.

TRAD
Whatever gramps.
(beat)
Gotta jet, meeting Andy and Tyson.

Trad heads to the exit.

UNCLE BRIAN
What about the eggs?

TRAD
All yours. Enjoy.

Trad brings out a pair of sunglasses from his pocket - puts them on.

Trad confidently walks out the door.

UNCLE BRIAN
(shouting)
Don't forget we are going to
Mansfield Hall in an hour...

Trad pops his head back in the room.

TRAD
Yeah, about that. Andy's dad is
test driving the new Astra. No can
do, regarding Mansfield Hall.

Uncle Brian is taken aback.

UNCLE BRIAN
But you have been looking forward
to Christmas day to see them for...
well since we left...

TRAD
Things change gramps. Got people to
see, things to do. You feelin' me?

Brian turns away to flip the eggs.

UNCLE BRIAN
Well if you change your mind, I'll
be leaving at ten.

Uncle Brian turns to Trad, but Trad is no where to be seen.

Uncle Brian sighs.

INT/EXT. MANSION - LATER

Trad knocks on the door.

Seconds later, Andy's Mother opens the door.

ANDY'S MOTHER
Hello dear! How are you?

TRAD
Good thanks, is Andy around?

ANDY'S MOTHER
I think he was going to test drive
a car today, with his father.

Trad grins.

TRAD

Yeah, I know. He invited me too.

ANDY'S MOTHER

Oh dear, he already left.

TRAD

What? Without me?

ANDY'S MOTHER

It looks like it, yes. He went with Tyron and some new boy he met yesterday, Franky.

TRAD

Oh okay. I was supposed to go with them.

ANDY'S MOTHER

I'm sorry dear, one thing you will learn about Andy is that he likes to keep his friends fresh. He makes new friends all the time, and sometimes forgets about his old ones.

Trad sighs.

ANDY'S MOTHER (CONT'D)

Maybe you could go play with your other friends...

Pause.

TRAD

Okay thank you.

Andy's Mother closes the door.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, KITCHEN

Clare stirs pots.

MISS BERTRUS (O.S.)

(shouting)

You can't just use spell check, you need to learn how to spell! So just learn! Now!

Miss Bertrus enters the kitchen.

MISS BERTRUS (CONT'D)

(to Clare)

Yes? What do you want?

Clare walks around to the front of the bench.

CLARE

Christmas day. I was wondering if I could have a day off please. I'm playing at a charity on Christmas night. We are raising money for -

MISS BERTRUS

- no. Not a chance, no way.

Clare is taken aback.

CLARE

Oh. It's just that it's for charity, and I'll only be away for only a few hours -

MISS BERTRUS

- I said no. And that's final.

Pause.

Miss Bertrus heads for the door.

Clare takes a deep breath.

CLARE

Why not?

Miss Bertrus spins around.

MISS BERTRUS

Because I said so Clare! You have been hired to help me, not that I even need your help, but you will do what you are told!

Clare bows her head.

Pause.

Miss Bertrus turns around and exits.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, DINING ROOM

The children sit at the table, their breakfast mostly untouched.

ELKIE (V.O.)

Christmas day. The only day of the year we actually got something we liked besides the basics like food or water. Uncle Brian couldn't afford to buy us toys and stuff, but every year a charity put some stuff together, and gave it to us. Really cool stuff too.

SUZ
Presents, presents, presents,
presents! I'm too excited!

ELKIE
And Trad and Uncle Brian are coming
back to visit today! Best day ever.

SARAH
I need some sandals.

ELKIE
You need a haircut!

SARAH
You need to shave the hair -

Miss Bertrus walks in the room. Clare follows. She drags a bag of presents behind her. The room suddenly goes silent, in awe of the large bag.

SARAH (CONT'D)
- on your face!

Everyone glances at Sarah.

SARAH (CONT'D)
(to herself)
Oops...

MISS BERTRUS
Children. My name is Miss Bertrus,
you are the orphans. Welcome, to
Christmas.

The children clap.

MISS BERTRUS (CONT'D)
Clare, hand out the presents
please.

Clare starts to give specific presents to the children.

MISS BERTRUS (CONT'D)
Do not open yours until everyone
has theirs. This, is the final
lesson. The last piece on the
puzzle to make everyone better
children. It is to teach you not to
be superficial. These presents are
from the charity in Launceston.

Miss Bertrus brings out a whistle. She blows it. The children rip open their presents.

As the wrapping comes off, it is revealed that under the wrapping is bricks, rocks, a box of leaves, blocks of wood, etc.

ELKIE

What the hell? Why do I need part
of a table?

SARAH

I hate bricks!

MISS BERTRUS

That's the lesson! Presents aren't
everything children -

ELKIE

We aren't children. Stop calling us
children.

Miss Bertrus walks over to Elkie. Stares wide eyes into her
eyes.

MISS BERTRUS

Excuse me?!

ELKIE

I said, stop calling us children.
We are "young adults" Uncle Brian
said.

MISS BERTRUS

I don't care what "Uncle Brian" has
told you - he's wrong. What I tell
you is right, and you are children.
Very ignorant and ones at that.

ELKIE

This is the worst Christmas ever!
We always get proper presents like
toys and stuff. It's the only time
of the year we can feel like...
feel like normal kids.

MISS BERTRUS

Well I have children too. And they
need presents. So I gave the ones
the charity gave *you*, to *them*.

The children, and Clare, gasp.

SUZ

That's stupid! You're stupid.

MISS BERTRUS

Am I really, *child*? You will all
thank me when you are older. Thank
me for helping you become better
children -

ELKIE

I will never thank you! Ever!

Elkie gets up to leave.

Miss Bertrus grabs her arm.

MISS BERTRUS
Not so fast, child.

Miss Bertrus throws Elkie to the ground.

Sarah screams.

Suz jumps up, tries to push Miss Bertrus. Miss Bertrus is about to hit her when -

UNCLE BRIAN
I don't think that's appropriate.

Uncle Brian stands at the door.

Miss Bertrus pauses, hand raised over Suz.

MISS BERTRUS
Oh really? And are you going to stop me, *old man*? You frail, sad old man.
(beat)
He went against the rules, and must be punished.

Miss Bertrus raises her hand again, Elkie cowers at her feet.

She turns to Clare.

MISS BERTRUS (CONT'D)
You're next.

Miss Bertrus is about to strike - Uncle Brian is too far away to stop here - when a brick smacks into the back of her head. She falls to the ground.

Clare stands behind her, brick in hands.

The children clap.

Elkie runs to Clare, hugs her.

The children turn to Uncle Brian. He smiles. Puts his arms out.

The children rush to him and hug him.

ELKIE
(to Uncle Brian)
Where is Trad?

Uncle Brian's smile fades.

UNCLE BRIAN

He... he was busy with his friends.
He said he didn't want to come. He
says hi though...

ELKIE (V.O.)

It didn't make sense. I wanted to
see him so much, and I thought he
wanted to see me.

Elkie slowly breaks off from the group, walks out of the
room.

FADE OUT.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, KITCHEN

Mr Preston stands next to Clare.

PRESTON

Well obviously her actions are not
tolerated at all, and she will
immediately lose her license and
right to be in charge of any
orphanage around the country.

Clare nods.

PRESTON (CONT'D)

And I'm sorry Clare, but your
actions were inappropriate too. I
know you were just trying to
prevent injury to the children, but
rules are rules.

CLARE

I understand. In a way, it's a
blessing. It's going to let me do
what I always have wanted to do.

Mr Preston smiles.

PRESTON

And what may that be?

EXT. MANSFIELD HALL

Clare stands in the driveway. She waves to the group of
children, Mr Preston and Uncle Brian at the hall. They wave
back.

Clare starts to play instruments strapped to her.

She walks off down the road as she plays the instruments.

The children cheer.

ELKIE (V.O.)

She said she would go around all the towns, playing for people. It was what she wanted to do since she was a child. And now she's an adult, she can do it.

(beat)

But first she was going to raise some money for charity...

EXT. STREAM

Elkie sits at the stream, her feet in the water. She has been crying.

Fish swim in the stream.

ELKIE

I wish I was like you fishies. Nothing to worry about, just water... lots of water. Don't care about anything -

TRAD

- But then you wouldn't have friends.

Elkie looks up. Trad stands there.

Elkie jumps up.

ELKIE

Trad!

TRAD

I thought I would find you here.

ELKIE

Uncle Brian said you weren't coming and I got all sad, and then -

TRAD

It's fine, I'm here now. I was just... busy before.

They both sit at the side of the stream.

TRAD (CONT'D)

I've thought about you everyday you know.

ELKIE

Me too.

(beat)

You know how I said our house should be painted yellow?

TRAD

Yeah...

ELKIE

Well it doesn't even matter if it's painted at all, as long as you and I are in it.

Trad hugs Elkie.

TRAD

You're the best.

(beat)

Hey, you know how you said you want to be a fish?

ELKIE

Yeah...

TRAD

I think you should.

ELKIE

What?

TRAD

I think you should be a fish... go join your friends...

Trad smiles, he nudges Elkie towards the water.

ELKIE

Oh no way!

TRAD

Yes way, fishy!

Trad playfully pushes Elkie in. Elkie shrieks. She grabs Trad as she falls in.

Trad topples after her.

They swim in the stream, as they splash and laugh.

FADE OUT.

INT. MANSFIELD HALL, DINING ROOM

Mr Preston stands next to Uncle Brian.

PRESTON

Mr Trechfield, we will need to hire another carer from the agency to look after the children. She or he will be recommended, unlike Miss Bertrus.

UNCLE BRIAN

I don't think that will be necessary...

PRESTON

I'm sorry Mr Trechfield, I thought this was clear. I have no trouble with you, and I'm sure you can look after the children yourself, but the new rule states -

UNCLE BRIAN

I'm not talking about being the children's carer, Mr Preston.

PRESTON

What are you implying?

Uncle Brian brings out a wad of forms from a bag on the table.

UNCLE BRIAN

I've done all the researched, and filled in these forms. They just need to be approved by you.

(beat)

I'm adopting the children.

Mr Preston grabs the forms. He looks at Uncle Brian.

PRESTON

I would love to approve your adoption of the children.

Uncle Brian smiles.

The children cheer.

Mr Preston signs the forms.

ELKIE (V.O.)

And that was the end of that. It went back to normal, except for a few obvious differences.

(beat)

Brent and JT were gone, but they were happy. We would see them again soon.

(beat)

We hadn't really learnt anything from Miss Bertrus that she wanted us to learnt, but we all believed that we were better from the experience. We were stronger, and found the cold reality that there were people in this world that weren't as nice as Uncle Brian.

The children remove the "presents" from the table.

ELKIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Uncle Brian was legally allowed to
look after all of us, so him and
Trad moved back in to Mansfield
Hall.

The children bring food to the table.

ELKIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Soon some of would be getting
older, and want to move out. But
that was a long time away. And when
it will happen - we will always
visit.

The children start to eat.

ELKIE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
It wasn't a usual Christmas day,
that's for sure, but we were
together. And happy.

(beat)

And that's always a good mix...

The children and Uncle Brian eat and chat as we

FADE OUT.