

1.0 Motivation for Adoption

Part 1 is all about exploring why you think you would be a good parent. Are you a parent of older children already and want to extend your family, or will this be the first child in your household?

Your social worker will be keen to understand your motivation to adopt, your pathway to the decision to apply and your present circumstances, including whether you have or have had any children or stepchildren together or separately (if applying as a couple).

If you have attempted to have your own biological child, including IVF or any other fertility treatment, you must describe where you are up to in that process and your past experiences (e.g. any failed pregnancies).

It is not allowed for an application for adoption to proceed concurrently with any fertility treatment such as a private IVF programme. If there is any risk of pregnancy during the approval process, you must discuss this with your social worker before you proceed, and you will be expected to take precautions.

Motivation

A couple are standing in the doorway of a small bedroom. His arms blanket her from behind. A beech IKEA table sits in one corner. A die cutting machine is buried under stacks of card in pastel shades, hand-made miniature flowers and a clutter of dies and tools. There is an unassembled wooden cot beneath the window. Otherwise the room is unfurnished. A fan of paint sample swatches lies in the centre of the beige carpet. The walls are magnolia.

‘Are are we settled on Winnie the Pooh?’ David asks.

‘Okay. Paint the walls yellow.’

‘Honey Mustard.’

‘Honey Mustard. Then I will add some details and stickers.’

‘Shall we do it this weekend?’

‘No, let’s wait till we know for definite.’

Cici strokes her flat stomach. She turns round to face him. ‘You agree with Scarlett?’ she asks.

‘All right. And Eric for a boy?’ He grins.

She shakes her head and puts her hand on his chest. ‘We’re not naming our baby after a comedian or a footballer. Go and enjoy yourself. I’m going to rest.’

‘Are you sure you don’t mind?’

‘Behave yourself. No smoking. And find out how Dougie’s little ones are.’

‘I will.’

He kisses her on the forehead and leaves her looking at the empty room.

* * *

Approval

Two middle-aged men are leaning across a circular pub table. One is tall with salt and pepper hair. The other is thick-set and unshaven; his chest is wide, so the top three buttons of his checked shirt are undone. There is a milk stain on his shoulder.

‘How was your visit to the IVF clinic?’ Dougie, the broader man, asks.

‘I kid you not,’ David says. ‘Private *murders* the NHS. You’d have loved this place.’

Dougie chuckles.

‘Huge La-Z-Boy leather armchair, forty-inch flat-screen telly with remote...’ David makes a ‘fish-was-this-big’ gesture with both hands, then takes a swig of beer. ‘The video menu was, I must say, extensive. Plenty of motivation.’

‘Literally.’

‘Don’t use that word, Dougie.’

‘Tell me more.’

‘Imagine a comprehensive library accommodating every taste and proclivity...’

‘Every taste, like? Literally?’

‘They might not delve as deep as the darkest recesses of your twisted Geordie mind, but there was plenty to pick from.’

‘And may one ask what you chose from this smorgasbord of viewing delight?’

‘That’s private.’

Dougie scratches his stubble. ‘So, I gather this was a more successful, erm, production, than last year with the NHS?’

‘I’m still trying to get the whole cupboard trauma out of my mind.’

‘I’m sure you’re exaggerating.’

‘I’m telling you. It was a broom cupboard on the main corridor of the hospital with a chair and a box of tissues. Not even a magazine – not allowed. I could hear a group of people outside the door

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discussing their NHS pensions. And everyone knows I'm in there!

'You're doing Jeff Goldblum hands again.'

'First time was even worse. We were still trying to keep it a secret then.' David leans in and glances from side to side. 'Did I tell you about Cici's colleague?'

'At the IVF clinic?'

'We're sitting there on egg and sperm day – this was the *first* time – and this couple walks in. Turns out he's an engineer at her place, rugby-type.'

Dougie folds his arms. 'Awkward.'

'The women went off with the nurses. Me and him sat waiting our turn, talking about football.'

'They've only got one room?'

'I said, "After you, mate," and sat there waiting while he did what he needed to do.'

'And what were you thinking?'

'I was thinking I should have gone first, like a penalty shoot-out. He was only in there five minutes, hadn't even broken sweat. He was a big lad, too, half my age.'

'Pressure.'

'Thankfully he didn't shake hands. Then it was my turn. Took ages, couldn't concentrate. No wonder it didn't work out.' He watches the dregs slide down the inside of his glass.

Dougie shuffles in his seat. 'You mustn't blame yourself.'

'They did say my numbers are a bit low, you know, owing to me being a bit older these days.'

'You are knocking on a bit.'

'Thanks. I'm still scoring at over thirty million a pop though.'

'Aye, plenty there. And is this the last go?'

'Cici was a mess last time. She never lets on, but I could tell she'd been crying when I got home. We've agreed no more after this. Five years is enough.'

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'Let's hope you hit the jackpot this time. Third time lucky, eh?' He softly chinks his glass against David's.

'I can't let her go through all that again.' David stares at his empty glass. He thinks of Cici drinking from a plastic hospital cup. Images of hospitals are never far from his mind. 'Must be my round.'

'Always.'

David gazes at the decor while the barmaid pulls two pints of Cumberland. The Cock and Bull has been David and Dougie's regular haunt for so long they don't even arrange to meet. They just turn up every Friday after work. His eyes scan walls decorated with black and white photos of buses and trucks, musical posters from a bygone era. There's an upright piano and a parade of guest beers.

Dougie is ready with more questions as David carefully places two full pints on stained real ale beer mats.

'Tell us a bit more about this private clinic.'

'You don't want a blow by blow...'

'Don't be a wazzock, you kna' what I mean.'

'Same as NHS really, but you have to take a credit card with you.'

'How much is it?'

'Six grand so far.'

'They can afford proper facilities then. So what happens?'

'Cici has injections for thirty days to stop her cycle, then another month when she carries on with them *and* another lot to speed up production, and no sex at all.' He takes a gulp of beer as images force themselves into his mind of Cici drawing drugs from a miniature glass vial and injecting herself in the belly. 'Then I've got to produce half a cupful on demand.'

'No wonder they make the environment as encouraging as possible.'

'Then they take some eggs out and I, erm, do my bit, and they put the two together.'

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‘Very well explained, doctor. Perhaps best you didn’t follow the medical career, eh? And how big is the... receptacle?’ Dougie lifts his glass.

‘It’s only small. You’ve got to be accurate.’

Dougie shakes with silent laughter. ‘Where’s she while this is taking place?’

‘She’s under anaesthetic, having the eggs taken out.’ David’s eyes wander to an overweight yellow Labrador snoozing in the corner. His mind drifts to Cici’s sleeping face; she doesn’t have her usual half-frown of pain when she’s asleep. He turns back to his friend. ‘The consultant’s a professor-type, charming man. Told us an analogy about egg warehouses and sperm factories. Few minutes later, Cici’s counting down from ten like she’s pissed, and the nurse does this as my cue.’ David curls his finger.

‘Didn’t you ask her if she’d give you a hand?’

David shakes his head. ‘I’m happy with Cici.’

‘Aye, she’s a belter that one.’ His face becomes serious. ‘What happens next?’

‘They have this thing called ICSI.’

‘What’s that?’

‘They take an individual sperm – one of the strongest-looking ones – and insert it directly into the egg. They do a few to increase the chances.’

‘How do they choose which ones?’

‘They go for the ones that are swimming straightest. Not that there’s anything wrong with my boys.’

‘Course not, just a few pissed ones.’

‘Exactly. Then they monitor the embryos on this new gadget they’ve got and after a few days they call us and put them back in.’

‘Again, excellent technical explanation.’

‘We’ve agreed if this one fails we’ll look at adoption.’

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Dougie frowns. 'I saw something on the Internet. There's money in this year's Budget for adoption. That and a penny on ale.' He softly pats his glass.

'Do you ever get any actual work done at that place since I left?' David asks.

'Not as such, but they don't seem to mind.'

'I heard something about them speeding up the approval process.'

'Not a surprise with this council.' Dougie shakes his head.

'That's what I'm worried about.' David leans forward. 'Did I tell you I enquired about fostering once?'

'Howay, man.'

'After I split up with Danny's mum.'

'How is the little fella?'

'Not so little, these days. Still plays a lot of football.' David remembers a race for a ball, wrestling on a wet lawn, being pinned down and flicked on the forehead.

'You were saying about fostering...?' Dougie prompts.

'Yeah, they were advertising on the radio. It had all that equal opportunities stuff. You know, "regardless of marital status..."'

'I can see you doing that.'

'They sent this young social worker along. She took one look at my suit and the piano. I got a rejection letter two weeks later.'

'Harsh.'

'They never even let me fill in the application. Turns out they only want the kind of single man that lives with a woman.'

'Or another man.' Dougie glances around the pub. 'Are you forced to go to the council for adoption? I wouldn't fancy all the investigations they do.'

'Not with your murky past. You are if you want a baby, and Cici's set on a baby, especially after all she's been through.' David looks at the dog again.

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‘Aye,’ Dougie says. ‘Toddlers is the best part. But don’t you get damaged kids, like?’

‘As long as they don’t have something really serious you manage, don’t you?’

‘Same as your own really; or like you with Danny.’

‘How are your monsters? Cici was asking.’

‘Horrible as ever, tearing the house apart. McTiny always asks when he’s going to the park with Cici.’

‘Buy one off you?’

‘It’s very tempting, lad, but get yer fuckin’ own. They are monsters but they’re our bairns.’ Dougie pulls back his frayed cuff, exposing a scratched watch. ‘I’m off after this one; check they’re tucked in proper.’

‘Me too, get back to Cici.’

* * *

Cici is lying on her back with her legs in stirrups beneath a humming air-conditioning unit. She is wearing only a loose blue hospital gown, no underwear. She is straining her head to see a monitor above her. At her side a nurse is rolling a scanner over the flat stomach of her patient and asking her to confirm her name and date of birth for the third time while giving gentle reassurance with her eyes. Two doctors in white coats are whispering below the monitor. The male one has a strong Eastern European accent.

In the corner of the room, perched on a flimsy plastic chair, sits David. He is bent forward, arms on legs, fingers intertwined. He looks up at the sound of Cici’s name.

A square hatch in the opposite wall opens. A face appears, a young woman with blue eyes, metal-framed glasses, a white coat and a mask. She asks the doctors whether they are ready. They

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speak softly and make small head movements that can only mean 'no'. They return to their secret debate.

The hatch clicks shut.

David stares at Cici until she twists her head round. He sticks his tongue out. She tries to smile, fails. Her brown eyes are glistening. He looks at two information sheets on the wall beside him. Photos of mothers holding babies next to men with good teeth in woolly jumpers; statistics in cheerful yellow; a graph, '40% success rate'; images of splitting cells – two, four, eight; perfect embryos; photogenic babies.

The double doors swing open. A man with tufty white hair and a pink tie strides through, causing everyone (except Cici, in stirrups) to hold themselves more upright. He grins confidently at the patient and stands very close to the two doctors. His crisp, plummy voice is clearer than the others but not loud enough that any words can be heard. He frowns at the monitor.

The woman doctor lowers her head and points out a detail on the paper in her hand.

Pink Tie turns round with a professional smile. 'My colleagues are concerned at this quite large shadow near the ovary. Fluid, perhaps.' He points his hand as if delivering a lecture. 'Given that we were so pleased with the embryos, I think it best if we pop the pair of them back in the fridge for now. They'll be safe there for a few months. We'd better deal with this shadow first...'

Pink Tie carries on speaking. He's explaining medical terms and telling them there is a choice of strategies.

David and Cici don't say anything. He is bent over again. She is trying to avoid eye contact, but eventually she looks up. She is sobbing silently, holding her lips together to prevent a scream. Her face is soaked.

His throat is blocked. He closes his eyes.

Can't breathe drowning school swimming pool chlorine in my

Motivation

eyes boy drowned here emergency ambulance can't look Cici hurting no baby hospital waiting injections scars no parking spaces dead babies Cici bleeding sperm in a plastic cup shadow lump cancer operation change for the car park perfect embryos dead twins blood on the bathroom floor Cici crying last chance boys don't cry can't breathe...

The nurse touches his shoulder. 'Are you all right?'

'Mm? We'll be fine, I'll look after her.' He takes a clean tissue from his jacket pocket and moves to Cici's side.

The nurse heads for the door. 'I'll leave you alone while she gets dressed, and I'll take your invoice through to reception. You can stay here a few minutes if you want a bit of privacy.' She smiles at Pink Tie. 'Professor Knight will write to your GP about the next steps.'

'Thank you very much.'