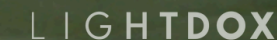
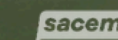
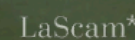
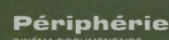
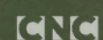




# A SECRET HEART



**A FILM BY TOM FONTENILLE**





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**A FILM BY TOM FONTENILLE**

France | 88 min | 2026

Over four years, a son's camera follows his father's transition into a woman, filming a family where everyone must reinvent their place.

## **PRESS NOTES**

Further press materials can be downloaded [HERE](#)

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# SYNOPSIS

In the space of four years, Lilou emerged from secrecy, becoming a 64-year-old woman who enjoys DIY, gardening, cycling and looking after her grandchildren. As I accompanied her through her transformation, I filmed a family healing its wounds and reinventing a place for everyone. This is my family, Lilou is my father.

# DIRECTOR'S NOTE

At the film's origin in 2021, my father's cross-dressing did not exist. My desire to film was born from a need for confrontation – to make him hear my sorrow, my incomprehension, or my anger, to shake up our relationship, and hopefully revive it. My mother had passed away a few years earlier, and my father seemed to want to wipe the slate clean, clearing the house of her memories and traces without consulting my sister and me. It was as if all emotion within him was locked from the inside. Taking up the camera became a final attempt for me to unlayer the mysteries of this person who is my father and yet had become a stranger to me. In front of the camera, my father complied willingly. He even seemed to enjoy it. But as soon as I invited him onto more personal ground, he fell silent and asked me to turn off the camera. Everything changed with the discovery of his cross-dressing.

This moment opened a breach in our relationship, even if, for a while, there was no question of bringing it up in front of the camera. One day, I showed him a short edit of the film. My father saw it, found it beautiful, and the next day he told me: "I would like you to film me as a woman." It was on that day that the film was born and the shooting truly began.



It was obvious from the beginning that I was a character in the film, although a separate one. How do you act as a character while simultaneously directing? How do you build an autonomous point of view that doesn't keep you at a distance from a reality that is evolving more every day? As the shooting progressed, I learned to master framing that allowed me both to anticipate the content of the sequences and to be fully and authentically a part of them.

The narrative follows my father's evolution, from the play of cross-dressing to a gender transition. Faced with her transformation, we wonder what place each of us will be able to find within the family, and what new bonds will emerge with the birth of her new identity. If Lilou does not know exactly how far to go in her feminisation process, she lives this quest in the present moment, and it is in this floating and fragile space that a new field of possibilities gradually opens up. As the barriers fade, our father-son relationship reinvents itself outside traditional patterns, and little by little, the expression of an intimate dialogue, made of shared pains, is reborn between us.

The arrival of my sister Manon in the film's setup makes it possible to break away from the father-son face-to-face and to relive through her words all the stages I myself went through. She also brings her own issues, desires, and wounds. Her relationship with our departed mother, as well as the representation of the father she would have liked to have. At the end of this journey, I manage to film the three of us together, around the same table, discussing the past, present, and future. The tone of these exchanges is heated, our wounds don't heal so easily, but going beyond this, they point towards the hope of shared healing.

Despite the shock of Lilou's accidental death before the shooting was completed, I never considered abandoning the film. Remembering our discussions, I recall how important a project 'A Secret Heart' had become in Lilou's eyes. For me, it is above all political: the desire to explore a new dimension for our family, the possibility of creating a family in a different way. A desire which, contrary to what one might think, found a new breath of life thanks to my father's transition—and not the other way around.

Footage captured over the past 4 years became much more than family archives: a unique window into a family's reality, testifying to the repair of family ties, and a new emotional dimension for my father that was missing from our family before her transition. This vision became a driving force for me, for the film, and for my desire to share our story.

I realize how much I hated the man my father was, and how hard it was to love him. And that I preferred the woman she had become. When I close my eyes, a single image continues to beat under my eyelids: Lilou speeding along on her bike, hair in the wind. Then, I feel my smile forming again. **Without knowing it, Lilou showed us the way.**

**- Tom Fontenille**



# LONG SYNOPSIS

A small group of people under a gloomy sky busy around a hole and a tree about to be replanted. It's a farewell ceremony. A cardboard box contains the ashes of someone who has died. Two young people, a boy and a girl, awkwardly open the box and scatter the contents in the dug hole, quietly saying goodbye.



## *4 years earlier.*

Lilou, at the time known as Patrice, sits opposite her son Tom, behind camera. An argument breaks out regarding belongings that were thrown away after the death of Yolande, Lilou's wife and Tom's mother, without her children having a say. That's how Lilou is; she needs to move on and she doesn't see the harm in it. Emotions aren't her thing, she wasn't raised that way.

Yet, that day, in front of the camera, she breaks down. In this floating moment that follows the intensity of the argument, her son questions her. What does she feel at this precise moment? Lilou's answer is evasive. Tom shifts direction and asks the question that has been burning his lips for some time: "When you cross-dress, what do you feel?"

Several months earlier, Tom and his sister, Manon, discovered their father was cross-dressing. Lilou is epileptic, and on numerous occasions, her children warned her about the risk of driving in this condition. That day, she had a seizure while driving and was rushed to hospital. Needing to bring her some belongings, Tom and Manon enter her house and discover some women's clothes in her wardrobe.



This newly discovered secret will play a key role in the relationship between Lilou and her son, and gradually begin repairing family relations disturbed by their mother's death, and mending wounds that have not yet healed. At first indifferent to the camera, Lilou fully accepts its presence the day she realizes it can help break the ice between her and her son. Filming becomes an opportunity for her to appear as she is: someone in search of her true femininity who, at 62 and under her son's gaze, begins a transformation into Lilou, embracing the idea of a gender transition.

The film spans 4 years of this parent-son relationship that reshapes itself month after month, to the rhythm of Lilou's transformation and her attempts to evolve her appearance, and the questions this raises for both of them. The duo is soon joined by Manon, Tom's sister, for whom Lilou's transition is more unsettling and reawakens other wounds. All three, despite the difficulties, the clumsiness, and the clashes, will manage to preserve the bond that unites them. They will try to understand what still makes them a family. Before it is too late.

# DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

After geography and sociology studies and a master's degree in documentary filmmaking, **Tom Fontenille** worked as a camera operator and regularly led filmmaking workshops. In 2025, he completed *Mémé Kim*, a medium-length film dedicated to his grandmother, who had been exiled to France. At the same time, he wrote and directed his first documentary feature *A Secret Heart*, which won the Film en cours award at the Belfort Entrevues festival and premiered at Cannes in the ACID selection.

## FILMOGRAPHY

***Sontay*** (20', 2019, doc, self-produced)

***Turbulences*** (25', 2021, doc, self-produced)

***Mémé Kim*** (52', 2025, doc, 5A7 Films)

***A Secret Heart (Cœur secret)*** (88', 2026, doc, 5A7 Films)





## WITH

Lilou Fontenille  
Manon Fontenille  
Tom Fontenille

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**SCREENPLAY**

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Tom Fontenille  
Tom Fontenille,  
Valentine Bonnaz

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**MUSIC**  
**SOUND EDITING**

Marie Bottois  
Camille Delafon  
Rym Debbarh-Mounir,  
Mélissa Petitjean  
Mélissa Petitjean  
Julien Pétri

**MIXING**  
**COLOR GRADING**

**PRODUCERS**

Martin Bertier,  
Helen Olive

**PRODUCTION COMPANY**  
**FRENCH DISTRIBUTOR**

5à7Films  
Météore Films

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