Doubt

By C. Jade Wyton

It has been a stressful day for Tiffany Goldman. She took her boys out for lunch and found herself struggling to keep them under control— And now, as they are arriving home, Tiffany finds herself needing a break to relax and pray to her god about her doubts as a mother.

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Tiffany couldn't believe the day she'd had.

It was probably *the* most stressful Saturday she had ever experienced in her entire *life*.

It had started out bad enough, with the emergency news broadcast being hijacked by the actual literal *mob* putting out a bounty for stolen artefacts, and then just gotten worse from there when she'd tried to take her boys out to make up for that stress and lost control of them.

Trent had been determined to slip away from her talk to everyone he saw; disappearing every single time she turned her back to him— Which she had to do to check on Logan who, at least, had decided he only wanted to talk to *one specific* person. Some… singer? Guitarist? They clearly played music; which was one of Logan's biggest special interests, so Tiffany could at least understand why Logan had been so interested in her.

What she couldn't wrap her head around, though, was those two suited men that had acted like they knew Trent— And the fact that Trent had just *accepted food from them!*

After all the drilling she'd done on her boys on not talking to strangers, she was *furious* about it.

Furious and terrified.

Especially since when she had made to confront the two men about it she'd been pulled aside by another of the store's patrons (a woman named… Ma… Maria? Tiffany couldn't remember), and worriedly told that those two men were *not* people she wanted to talk to.

Tiffany had been so angry she'd barely comprehended the reason why; but Maria had spoken to her that same way that her friends did when she was about to pick a fight she couldn't win and she'd instinctively stepped down.

But then the two men had turned to her and her son and *waved goodbye,* giving them greetings from some… Constance person?

Who the *fuck* was *Constance?*

Both her boys were adamant they didn't know a Constance.

And when she'd messaged her friends none of them had known the name.

It made her so terrified she could barely breathe.

Anything could have happened to her boy!

He could have been poisoned. Or kidnapped. Or— Or he could have—

The entire taxi ride home had been a lecture on stranger danger.

Logan had seemed to take it seriously, though Trent had spent it sulking.
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Doubly so, when she had continued the lecture the entire way up the stairs to their apartment.

'And Logan— You too! I don't want you talking to strangers like you did today.'

'She wasn't a stranger, though! She was Gunnar's daughter!' Logan defended, flicking through his book (which he had been clinging to *all day* like it was a part of his body) and holding it out to his mother. 'Look! Look! See? Johanna Magnolia! There's a photo of her with Gunnar and everything!'

Tiffany turned from her front door that she was halfway through unlocking to the book, examining the page Logan had flipped to. It... certainly *was* a photo of the snakefolk woman he had been talking to. Next to a dwarven man she recognised as a very popular country singer.

Then, Tiffany noticed the signature on the edge of the photo, and felt her shoulders slack.

'She gave you her autograph?'

'Mhm! That's why I wanted to talk to her! So I could get it!'

'Logan—' Tiffany sighed, and turned back to the apartment door to unlock it. 'Okay. I understand that. But hon, you *have* to tell me before you approach these people, okay? I don't want you getting hurt.'

'Am I in trouble?' Logan asked, tears welling in his eyes. 'Are you mad?'

'A little bit, yeah,' Tiffany told him, before pecking a kiss on his forehead and ushering him inside. 'Just try a little harder for me next time, okay?'

'Okay....'

'I'm in a lot of trouble, aren't I?' Trent asked, sliding to his mother and resting his head on her shoulder in a way that Tiffany *knew* was to try and coax out her good side.

'*Absolutely,*' Tiffany responded simply, putting an arm around her son and leading him inside. 'You took food from a stranger. *And* you didn't *give* it to me when I told you to! You can't play the innocent card when you refused to do what I told you!'

Trent slipped away from his mother and scuffed his foot along the ground for a moment. Then, he glanced up at Tiffany with a grimace. 'How *much* trouble am I in?'

Tiffany shrugged widely; her hands falling heavily against her sides. 'Enough that next time your show is cancelled, I'm not sure I'll be able to trust that I can take you out for lunch.'

'You can trust me!' Trent exclaimed, worriedly stepping back to his mother and wrapping his arms around her. 'You can! I promise!'

'I don't know, hon. You really made things hard for me, today.... Where is my good boy, hm?' Tiffany asked, taking Trent by the cheeks. 'Where is he? Because he wasn't back at the restaurant, was he? Where was he?'

Trent shrugged his shoulders, not meeting his mother's eye.

'You worry me sometimes, hon,' she said. 'I just want to keep you safe. Okay? You understand that?'

'*Yeah,*' Trent sighed.

'I mean, you heard the news,' Tiffany pushed. 'So much is going on right now. It's not safe to be out on your own. I need you to stay *close* to me when we go out.

Yeah?'

'I guess,' Trent gave another shrug and stepped back, letting go of his mother and rubbing his arm. He shuffled in place for a moment, looking sheepish, before turning and retreating to his bedroom.

Tiffany just sighed, shaking her head and crossing her arms.

'He's not used to being in trouble,' Logan piped up, slowly edging towards his mother.

'*I'm* not used to *either* of you two being in trouble,' Tiffany said as she put an arm around her boy. 'And yet here we are.'

'Mm…' Logan fiddled with the corner of his book, before leaning into his mother. 'You said you were mad at us.'

'A little bit, yeah.'

'Yeah… you also said you're scared.'

'I am,' Tiffany acknowledged. 'I get *very* scared for you boys, when you do things like this.'

'So you're more scared than you are mad?' Logan asked, a hopeful rise in his tone coming through. 'Is there a way that I can made you not-so-mad?'

'I'm angry *because* I'm scared,' Tiffany explained. 'So the only way you can make me not-mad is to not frighten me so much, okay?'

'Oh… *okay,'* Logan agreed slowly, with an expression that made it clear he still didn't completely understand what exactly it was that he had done wrong. 'I'll try.'

Tiffany pecked another kiss onto her son. 'Thank you. I know you're trying. I'm just… worried. I have a feeling….'

Logan watched as his mother trailed off, and shuffled anxiously. 'About what?'

Tiffany took a deep breath, and forced herself to smile. 'Nothing that you should be worrying about— Hey, look. Go get Trent, tell him I said you can watch a full disk of your show.'

'A *full disk?!*' Logan's eyes went wide. 'For real?'

Tiffany nodded. 'Yeah. A full disk! I need… to go pray.'

Logan jumped in place for a moment, flapping his arms, before excitedly rushing off to get his brother— And Tiffany used the opportunity to retreat into her own bedroom.

She took her place on her kneeling pillow in front of the shrine she had made for her patron Havatii, and took up a piece of thin, colourful construction paper from the box she'd placed beside it.

She began folding it in her hands, making another flower to place on the shrine— She still had some room for it, next to the small pile of coloured pebbles her boys had found and wanted to give to her god.

It was a good to have her hands doing something as she quietly let herself breathe and get her thoughts together…. She could hear her boys making their way to the lounge, now, and listened out as they put on one of their shows….

'Oh, Havatii, we're really in it now, aren't we?' she sighed, placing the finished flower on the shrine and starting on another. 'Things are getting hard, and I'm just not sure what to do. I love the boys —with every fibre of my being— but they're getting to be a *lot*. You know?'

The shrine, obviously, didn't respond.

‘Maybe… it wouldn’t be so bad if they weren’t such… big kids?’ Tiffany found herself giving a weak chuckle. ‘Logan’s almost as tall as me, now. And I don’t think Trent’s realised yet that he’s getting stronger than me. I’m… really worried that if he figures that out, I’ll lose a sense of authority with him, and he’ll push more boundaries, and I won’t be able to stop him from hurting himself…. I’m not sure what to do about that. I talked to my friends, but I didn’t really like their suggestions…. I don’t think they completely grasp how *serious* this is. Nine year olds aren’t supposed to be as tall as their parents. I mean… I’m not ungrateful that you gave them to me— But sometimes, I wish they were half kobold, instead of lizardfolk. You know what I mean?’

The shrine remained silent. So Tiffany lit some incense and took a long, deep breath.

‘I don’t know. Ruby thinks I should find their father,’ said Tiffany. ‘She’s made some good points, of course. She *always* does…. She’s talked about him helping keep them under control. And getting his health records, in case the boys are at risk of anything. And… I hate to admit the money thing is there, but it *is* something that’s there,’ she swallowed, rubbing her temple and shaking her head sadly. ‘I just hope I’m not letting her push me into a mistake. I think I need a sign. Or some sort of reassurance that I’m actually doing alright.’

More silence from the shrine. A yawning silence, that continued for a long time as Tiffany knelt and waited….

And waited.

And waited.

For *anything* to happen.

‘*Hm,*’ Tiffany gave a short hum as the incense finally burnt out, and she rose to her feet. ‘Well…. I should go check on the boys.’

—END—

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