First Move

By C. Jade Wyton

Tiffany still doesn't know what to do about Constance's threatening behaviour. It's clear her boys have noticed something is wrong. Especially Logan. So Tiffany has to consider what to say to them seriously. Just like she has to consider what to do about Constance seriously.

Contains mentions of stalking and threatening behaviour.

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Tiffany wasn't sure when she had fallen asleep, but she'd woken up to Trent jumping on top of her, his full weight winding her as Logan's cries of "No! No! She's *sleeping,* Trent!" went unheard.

Trent had then blasted his mother with information:

'Grandma called! She wants to know where you are! She said you were gonna drop us off so you could go out with a friend! But you were meant to drop us off an hour ago— You didn't tell us we were going to visit Grandma today! Did you forget?'

'*Y-Yeah,*' Tiffany managed, taking her son's elbow and attempting to remove it from her stomach. 'Hon, you're hurting me.'

'Oh!' Trent gasped and scurried backwards. 'Better?'

'Yeah,' Tiffany sighed and sat up. She smiled at her son, tired but warm, as she caught her her breath. 'You have to be careful, honey; you're a big boy now.'

'Sorry,' Trent apologised, sliding up his mother's side. Then, he pointed at her neck. 'What's that?'

It took a few moments for his question to register, and Tiffany quickly reached up and removed the collar. 'Oh— It's called a choker,' she told him. 'It's like a mix between a bracelet and a necklace.'

'Really?'

'Yeah, I used to wear them all the time when you were younger,' she explained. Then, her tired smile grew into a cheeky grin as she grabbed her son and pressed their foreheads together. 'I stopped because *yoooou* used to grab at them!'

'Nuh-uh! I wouldn't do that!' Trent argued with a giggle.

'You used to!' Tiffany told him. 'And you were a strong kid! Once you grabbed something, I couldn't get it back!'

'I'm *still* strong!' Trent beamed. And then, as if to prove it, he wrapped his arms around his mother and hefted her upwards; nearly managing to flip her over as she squealed and pulled back.

'*Trent!*' she squealed. 'Don't try and *flip* me!'

'Why not?' Trent asked as Tiffany broke from his grip and stumbled to her feet. 'I flip Logan all the time and he loves it!'

'No I don't!' Logan argued, crossing his arms and leaning on the doorframe.

'Yeah you do!' Trent teased, jumping up and hurrying over to bother his
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brother. He batted at Logan until Tiffany got between them and ushered Trent away.

'Trent! Leave him alone!' she scolded, herding Trent into his room. 'Go get ready to see Grandma— You know if I let you show up in clothes that dirty I'll never hear the end of it!'

'Okay! Okay!' Trent laughed as he leant on his door. 'I'll get changed! Can we get food on the way to Grandma's?'

'No, hon, nowhere's going to be open today,' Tiffany sighed before rolling her eyes playfully. 'If you're hungry you can take something with you.'

Trent blew a raspberry and shut his door before Tiffany could scold him.

'Ah, *Trent,*' Tiffany gave a weak chuckle and shook her head. Then she turned to Logan, and motioned at him. 'You too, hon. You should get changed.'

'Yeah… I know,' Logan replied; though he didn't move. Instead he looked at his feet and shuffled in place.

'Logan?'

'*I heard you crying before,*' Logan said, so softly Tiffany almost missed it.

'Oh…' Tiffany felt her heart drop. 'Hon— Don't worry about that. I was just… tired and stressed. You know? It's been a rough week, but I… I'm fine.'

It was clear Logan didn't believe her.

'Honey, I'm fine,' Tiffany lied again. 'Nothing's wrong. You don't have to worry about me.'

'Mm…' Logan shuffled again, before looking up at his mother and asking, 'Who was that man? Why is he trying so hard to talk to us? Is it because of when we got on the wrong train?'

'Don't you worry about him,' Tiffany pressed. 'I'm… it's for me to deal with, okay?'

'Mum—'

'It's not for you to worry about, Logan,' Tiffany said, her voice growing firm to indicate that what she was saying wasn't to be argued with. Then, when Logan looked hurt, she sighed and softened her tone. 'Go get changed, hon. Grandma'll get sad if we're any later then we already are.'

Hesitantly —clearly not wanting to leave his mother's side— Logan made his way to his room. He paused at the door before slipping inside to get changed.

And Tiffany let out a long breath before returning to her own room to clean herself up and get ready to go out again.

She didn't bother getting changed completely, though she fixed up how her dress sat on her shoulders and retrieved her hat from her bed…. Then, she saw where she'd dropped the collar while playing with Trent and picked it up. She slipped it into her bag, swallowing as she thought about Constance again.

She had to do *something* about him. She couldn't continue to ignore him; it was obvious he was ready to escalate if she didn't make the first move…. And whatever mind games he was trying to play with her weren't something she wanted to inflict on her poor boys….

It was still clear to her that the best route to take with this man was some sort of appeasement or compromise. He definitely wasn't going to take a straight-up *no* for an answer.

But she couldn't just *hand over* control to him, could she? If she did that, he

would think he could do whatever he wanted. And she would end up like poor Creedence….

No. She had to try and assert at least *some* authority. Even if only a little bit…. Just enough so he mightn't think to push her around.

Boundaries.

If *she* approached *him* and gave him a firm list of boundaries…. *Maybe* he would be happy enough to have her finally talking to him and agreeing to *something* that he wouldn't try and push back and argue with her terms.

She wasn't sure on that, though. He didn't seem like that sort of person.

She'd have to bluff confidence and lie through her teeth about not being scared.

God, *lying!*

She couldn't even lie to her *children!* How was she supposed to convince *Constance* that he didn't make her want to be sick with fear?

'Mum! We're ready!' Trent's voice cried through the wall, and immediately Tiffany's bedroom door was opened and her son hurried in.

Trent was trailed by a much slower Logan, who wouldn't look his mother in the eye as she was pulled excitedly out of her room and towards the front door.

She let herself be led through the apartment complex down to the parking lot, where she did a quick double-check of her car before letting the boys in.

There was about ten seconds of arguing over the front seat before Tiffany told *both* boys to get in the back.

'If you can't be civil about it, neither of you can have it,' she said, simply.

'Aw, but Mum—'

'No buts, Trent,' she cut her son off with a ruffle of his headfin and a playful shove to the other side of the car. 'You do as I say.'

'Mm, *fine,*' Trent conceded, grinning widely at his mother as he climbed in the back. 'And I suppose you want me to wear my seatbelt, too?'

'Yes, you *monkey!*' Tiffany snorted, poking at her son to tickle him. 'Seatbelt on!'

'And no kicking the back of your chair?'

'Absolutely *no* kicking me while I drive!'

'Heh— That's what *you* think!' Trent mocked. Then he squealed in delight as Tiffany flicked him on the nose. 'Okay! Okay, no kicking.'

'And you leave your poor brother alone during the drive!' Tiffany preemptively scolded before shutting the door and heading around the car to make sure Logan had settled in.

He was buckling himself up as Tiffany reached him, so she pecked a kiss on his cheek and shut his door for him.

Then she started them on their way to her mothers' house.

She put on the CD she had gotten from Lonnie as the boys talked amongst themselves— And slapped Trent's hand gently-but-firmly as he leant over to try and change it to the radio.

'Excuse me, young man!' Tiffany scolded. 'I'm listening to that!'

'Why?' Trent asked.

'B— Because I like it?!' Tiffany sputtered the words out, trying not to laugh as Trent giggled at her. 'One of the band members is… sort of a friend of mine.'

‘Sort of?’

‘Yeah,’ Tiffany confirmed. ‘He’s friends with a friend, and we sometimes talk.’

‘What about?’

‘Uhhh…’ Tiffany tried to think of a way to avoid saying they spent most of their time *flirting*. ‘Just… stuff.’

‘Stuff? What *kind* of stuff?’

‘Adult stuff,’ Tiffany responded; looking in her rear view mirror just in time to see both her boys cast each other *very* unimpressed looks. ‘What? That’s what we talk about!’

Trent rolled his eyes, shaking his head as he slouched in his seat. ‘So… where are you going while we’re at Grandma’s?

‘I’m going to spend time with some new friends,’ Tiffany told them. She deliberately left out that one of her new friends was Johanna Magnolia; if Logan found out she was talking to one of his idols….

No, no. She didn’t want to make the friendship weird like that.

‘Where?’

‘A place called O'Hannigans,’ Tiffany told them. ‘We’re going to listen to this band, live.’

‘Because you’re friends with one of them?’ Trent asked.

‘Yeah, exactly,’ Tiffany chuckled. ‘And we want to support them all.’

‘Hm… yep! That makes sense,’ Trent gave a nod as he turned and grinned at Logan. ‘And you were worried about Mum! See? She’s fine!‘

Tiffany just sighed, at that, and turned into her parents’ street.

‘Alright, boys, come on!’ she said, clambering out of the car and tapping on its roof. ‘Upstairs!’

They didn’t need to be told twice— The pair all but leapt out of the car and rushed into the building, Tiffany trailing behind them at her own pace. They made their way up to her parents’ floor (Logan holding the elevator open for Tiffany as Trent mashed the “close door” button) and Tiffany hung by the elevator as her boys rushed to the right door and knocked.

As much as she loved her mothers, she didn’t want to get caught up and find herself late for her plans; so she simply waved at them before heading back down to her car.

She let out a long breath of relief as she made her way outside.

She loved her boys, but sometimes she just… needed some time to herself. And she was glad that her mothers were always happy to step in and help.

Tiffany headed for her car, opening the door and pausing to pull out her phone and text her friends— Her new friends, Joey and Maria and Scarecrow.

“*Hey, anyone need a lift to O’Hannigans? I’m not going to be doing any drinking so I can give lifts home afterwards, too. Let me know!* ☐”

She hit send, and slipped her phone back in her bag before….

Tiffany saw someone out the corner of her eye, and felt her skin prickle with anxiety.

It was a couple of those avarcian men…. Leaning against a wall and chatting casually to each other….

Fuck! Had they followed her here, too?!

She shouldn’t be surprised.

Tiffany swallowed, glancing around to check if anyone else was in the street and feeling another wave of anxiety hit her as she realised that the street was almost empty and everyone was probably at home recuperating from the festival….

Well… Tiffany took a deep breath. *She'd said to herself she wanted to make the first move, hadn't she?*

'H-Hey! Hey! Avarcians!' she called out, slowly reaching into her bag. She could feel a lump of anxiety forming in her throat, but swallowed it down and tried to steel her nerves as she addressed the men. 'You know Constance?'

The avarcians turned to Tiffany; one of them opening his mouth but not getting time to respond as Tiffany pulled put the golden collar and continued;

'Because— Because you can tell him that if he wants *this,*' she started, ignoring the pounding of her heart as she wrapped the collar around her neck and held it. 'I come with a list of terms and con*ditions!*'

Tiffany almost swore at herself as her voice broke; and felt herself wince as she tried to keep eye contact with the men.

'He—' she cut off, taking a deep breath and swallowing again. 'He can try to court me if he wants. But he has to impress me! And— And that's not easy to do, so— *Yeah!*'

Her voice broke again, and the avarcian opened his mouth— But Tiffany didn't give him time to respond as she climbed back into her car and slammed the door shut; driving away perhaps just a *little bit* over the speed limit.

—END—

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