Leaving a Message

By C. Jade Wyton

Tiffany, feeling a whole mess of emotions about herself and her sexuality, calls the only person she can think of and leaves what she realises far too late is a very embarrassing message on their answering machine.

Contains depictions of negative self-thinking around relationships and sexuality.

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Was there something wrong with her?
There had to be.
This wasn't normal, was it?
This disconnect.
This inability to fall in love?

Tiffany let out a heavy sigh and sat up in bed; not bothering to brush her long head-fin aside as it fell over her face.

She'd had her friends over —Andi, Steph, Cleo and Ruby— and they'd binged-watched a small pile of movies they'd been wanting to show each other for a while. Each one of them picking something from the pile throughout the night.

The differences in their tastes had really given Tiffany something to think about….

The girls had all put aside movies about love and romance. Live-action, mostly. Set in modern times with drama and relationships and misunderstandings that seemed so incredibly *stupid* Tiffany wondered how these people could hold down a job….

Even Ruby's more action-themed choice was, at its core, about romantic love.

Hell, even the show *her sons* had picked out after they'd woken up and asked if they could join in the movie night (Logan planting himself *firmly* between his mother and Ruby) had the main character falling in love.

But of course Tiffany's choice…. Tiffany's choice felt almost *embarrassing,* now. It was an old childhood favourite of hers, featuring an animated group of young animals seeking out medicine to cure a mysterious illness that had befallen their town….

Not a single kiss in sight. Just childish sing-alongs and birds with hats.

Her friends had said they'd enjoyed it. Of course they hadn't said anything bad— They'd been their lovely selves and laughed along so genuinely….

But still. The clash of genres just made Tiffany feel so awkward and othered that she'd been relieved when her friends had headed home.

Though she still couldn't sleep.

What was wrong with her?

Another sigh, and Tiffany pushed herself out of bed to pace the apartment.

Everyone else seemed to *love* romance.

Why couldn't she just…. Why didn't she *get* it?
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What *was* it?

She loved people; her sons and her mothers and her friends.

But she didn't understand the difference between that and *being in love*.

Like… where did it start?

What was the boundary?

Why were people so caught up on *dating* the people they slept with? What *possible* connection were they feeling that was deeper than the friendship they already had?

Tiffany didn't get it.

She wished she did. But she just… *didn't*.

'*Mum?*' a sleepy voice squeaked, and Tiffany turned to see Logan had poked his head out of his room. 'What's wrong?'

'Nothing. I'm fine, hon,' Tiffany lied. 'Just… going to the bathroom. You go back to bed.'

Logan definitely didn't believe her. But, thankfully, he retreated into his room without arguing….

Actually, she kind of did *need the bathroom*.

So she turned and made her way there.

She spent a little too long washing her hands as she got lost in thought again.

Gods, she really did want more kids.

She splashed cold water into her face at the thought, and shook herself out.

Stop thinking that, you stupid woman.

Oh, it was true though….

Tiffany rubbed her eyes and let out a long, frustrated groan.

Even *if* it turned out her boys were okay with having a younger sibling, it was going to be impossible to find someone suitable as the father.

The men she met were either rude and unappealing and she had no interest in them at all, or they were too sweet and lovely and would want to be involved more than she was comfortable with them being….

She just needed a mediocre guy who wouldn't be a dick during the process, but then would back off afterwards and not try and take over. Not nasty, but also not too lovely.

Like… like Creedence.

Oh, gods. What she had with Creedence was *perfect*.

She wished she could have that with another man.

Tiffany took a deep breath, her hands moving from her face to her gills, and glanced into the hallway at the clock.

Fuck, it was already 2AM?

She hadn't slept, yet….

Hm… maybe she could have a bath and relax.

Yeah. That sounded nice.

Tiffany turned on the bath, letting the water run warm with a concoction of bubbles and soaps as she retrieved her phone from her room. She put on a low, gentle piece of music on her phone and climbed into the bath; letting the heat seep into her joints as the soaps softened her scaly skin.

Oh, this was a good idea….

Tiffany let out a long, long breath.

She needed this.

Just a nice, long soak….

It was a little lonely, though.

Tiffany groaned at the thought.

Perhaps she could call someone and talk?

Retrieving her phone, Tiffany flicked through her contacts.

Who could she call at this hour?

Not Maria. And by extension not Joey. Maria had work and now that the girls lived together calling one would definitely wake both of them….

Maybe Scary? Though she had Paisley to worry about now, it just seemed rude to call her at this hour.

Mm…. Maybe she could drop a text in the group chat with Scary and Maria and Joey and see if anyone answered…?

That didn't seem like such a bad idea.

Though, ten minutes later and nobody replied.

So Tiffany sighed and looked again.

Maybe she could talk to Cleo? Or Andi? Steph? No. They all had places to be in the morning….

Ruby?

Tiffany dialled her friend— Though there was no answer. So she hung up and continued searching her contacts.

Lonnie? No. And not any of her other booty calls, either…. They just weren't the people Tiffany needed to talk to, right now….

Oh, definitely not Shelf.

And not her mothers, either.

Maybe—

Tiffany paused, hovering over Creedence's contact.

Creedence….

The last time she'd messaged him was a week ago, sending him photos that Trent had taken of a butterfly he'd seen (the sweet thing had remembered an off-hand comment Tiffany had made about Creedence's interest, and wanted to reach out to his father)…. Maybe she could call him and ask how he was doing? They hadn't really spoken much since dealing with Constance. Just a text here and there. And he had that new job after all— Maybe she could ask about how it was going?

Maybe….

Maybe…..

Tiffany pressed the dial button and put the phone on speaker so she could put it down on the edge of the bath.

It rung once.

Twice….

Ah… his answering machine….

Tiffany lifted a hand to hang up, but instead found it hovering it over the button as she hesitated.

She should leave a message, shouldn't she? If she didn't then he'd probably wonder why she'd called….

'Uh. Hey… its Tiffany,' she started, giving a small cough to clear her throat.

‘Listen. I know it’s been a while since we spoke properly but I just… I dunno. It’s one of those nights. I can’t stop thinking about things. Uh. Oh, that sounds weird, doesn’t it? Like I’m going to make some sort of confession. No. That’s uh—‘ Tiffany stammered, feeling that she was beginning to talk faster than her brain could process her own words; it was like she was watching herself talk on the phone from another room, and she couldn’t stop herself as she continued. ‘I don’t mean it in a weird way or anything. I’ve been thinking about like… lots of things. Like…. Movies? And, um… soap. Did you know soap has existed for almost five thousand years? Yeah uh. The uh. The ancient Egyptians had soap….’

Why the fuck are you talking about soap?!

‘Can you imagine what it would have been like to be an ancient Egyptian?’

What the fuck, girl? Why would you say that?!

‘Uh— Anyway. Um…. I’m just calling… because…. Well. I don’t. Actually. Know why. I’ve messaged a few people but nobody’s answering so. Uh. Yeah. Kinda… lonely tonight.’

Oh, yeah. Because saying that *to your baby-daddy isn’t going to give him the wrong impression…*

‘Not in *that* way, though. You know? I mean…. Do you know? Like…. Do you get lonely at night now that you don’t have Constance?’

Oh, my god…!

‘Uh—‘ she gave a weak chuckle. ‘Actually that’s a stupid question. You’re… you’re way better off without him. He was… you deserve better. Someone who’ll treat you right. Cos… you’re a nice guy. And you deserve someone nice.’

Okay. Good job. Hang up, now.

‘You’re just…’ a sigh escaped Tiffany. ‘You’re just… so ideal.’

AAAAAH?!

‘Like I mean— Uh—‘ Tiffany realised what she said and felt her cheeks begin to burn. ‘Like. I mean. Uh— For someone else? Not— Not me? Well. I mean. You kinda are ideal for me but only because you— Uh. I mean. Uh….’

SHUT?! UP?!

‘Like I-I uh— I know you said you weren’t interested in having kids and all that… and I mean…. Uh…. The ones you’ve made are really good and I just…. I really like what we have. You know? With the, uh…. With how you don’t really… get involved? Like… thank you. For… not… trying to… be their dad without permission…?’

Congrats, moron. Because that’s going to make him think you’re a normal and sane woman.

‘I know it sounds ridiculous and all. But it’s exactly what I need right now and I really just— I can’t find anyone else who *gets* that…. Well. Ruby offered. But… I mean. It’s *Ruby,*’ she gave a tired-but-humoured chuckle before shifting, the loud sound of the bathwater echoing in the quiet room. ‘I don’t want that thing in me. I mean. Can you *imagine* what our baby would look like? Some sort of furry little cat-fish! Hah!’

No!

‘You *get* me. You just….’

No no no!

‘God, I wish you could just get me pregnant and then ghost me for another

ten years….'

GIRL?! GIRL WHAT THE FUCK?!

She didn't mean to say it— But she did. And she couldn't take it back.

She paused for a long moment, gathering herself, before leaning against the side of the tub and mumbling, 'I, um…. What I'm trying to say is I really don't think other people understand just *how* possessive I feel of my boys, and how that affects dating and stuff. My friends keep trying to hook me up into relationships but like… the idea of dating and sharing my sons makes me feel so… *so*…' she gave a little mock-growl to get her feelings across. 'That's why you're so perfect. You understand that they're *mine*. I don't have to remind you. And you don't want to force some kind of connection with me that isn't there…. I dunno. Even without my boys in the picture I have trouble with the idea of *dating* and *romance*. Like I just… I don't get it. And sometimes it makes me feel like I'm broken or something. Well… the way people react to me when I talk about it makes me feel broken, at least…. They don't seem to understand that I just *can't* bring myself to feel that way about someone….'

You've embarrassed yourself enough. Hang up now, you fucking idiot.

'*Anyway*…. Uh…. Trent wants to know if you'll come over sometime? I don't know if you're interested, but he really wants to get to know you better and I promised him that I'd bring it up the next time we spoke so…' Tiffany cleared her throat. '*Yeah*…. Oh, but uh. Logan's a little bit protective of me at the moment so just be aware of that. He might try and muscle up to you a little but it's all just for show.'

Okay. That's good. Good place to end it. Now say goodbye and hang up….

'Just, um… call me back sometime. Let me know what you want to do…. Okay. Uh. Bye.'

Finally!

Tiffany hung up, feeling her cheeks burning with embarrassment as she shifted loudly in the bath.

Gods, she was an idiot.

She could have handled that so much better.

She'd left so much room for misunderstanding and…. Oh, *god*.

No, wait— No—

She couldn't just *say all of that* to Creedence, could she?!

He was going to think she wanted to date him or something!

Fuck.

Oh, gods.

She needed to call him back and tell him what she meant— Maybe he'd even pick up this time and she could just tell him to delete the message and not listen to it—

No, she wasn't that lucky.

'Hey, sorry, it's me again. Sorry to leave another message it's just. Y-You know, if we meet up it doesn't even have to be about kids? That's not what I was meaning. We could just talk or hook up or— Well, I mean. Not *hook up* hook up. I mean. Not unless you *want* to. But like. That's not what I'm meaning. I mean, I'm not interested in you like that— I mean. You're not unattractive. Just— Uh—'

By the end of the night, she'd left a total of four messages. Each one digging

the hole deeper than the last.

—END—

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