

'Please Leave a Message' - written by Hannah McGregor

JAMIE picks up their phone, dials and calls a number - straight to voicemail. *Leave a message after the tone.* They hesitate.

JAMIE

(nervously)

Hi, it's me. Jamie.

(pause)

... Well I guess that's kind of stupid, I'm sure you know that.

I'm just calling to ask-

(mutters to self)

...to let you know, no, to let you know...

JAMIE stops the recording and deletes it. Deep breath. They pick up the phone again. *Leave a message after the tone.*

(more boldly this time)

Hey Anne, it's Jamie. I'm calling to say sorry, and let you know I've been thinking about getting away for a bit. I don't want to fight, I mean, I guess I'm just trying to say that I...

They stop the recording again.

What the fuck am I saying?

They sigh, exhausted.

They phone again. *Leave a message after the tone.*

Hey, Anne. I-

They choke.

Fuck this. Mum. Hey. I'm sorry. Do you know how many times

I've recorded this stupid wee thing?

(chuckles to self)

You deserve something.

They pause. Moment of truth.

(fondly)

Do you remember when we would walk go on those walks? You had to force me to go on them when I was younger, but I kind of started to enjoy them the older I got. You'd call on me to get my boots on and we'd go off, away from the wee village and just walk. I remember when we would go up the wee hills beside the house; they weren't Munros or anything, but they were tough, especially after it had rained. But you knew the paths

so well, Mum. I was never scared. You would traverse the rocks, always knew the safest place to cross burns, how to orient ourselves, even in the pissing rain. You always knew where we were heading and how to circle back. You taught me that, too.

It was how you grew up, in the middle of bum-fuck nowhere in the Highlands. Proper peat and brine life you had. And I guess that made me proud of you, that you valued that old way of life. I never told you that; because it made me scared of how you would react when you found out.

Beat. More tentatively, they continue.

People talk about a 'moment' when they realised that they were different, like it's a lightbulb that suddenly dings above your head, saying "Congratulations! You're a homo!". That's how it seems that other people find out. For me it wasn't so much a realisation, as a creeping sense of dread.

I prayed every single day that there would be a moment which proved me wrong, hoping against all hope that I could play the part, that I could be someone else, for just long enough that I would start to believe it. I tried so hard to keep things the way they were; because I know the way that you see people like me.

It's not like you mean it. I know you don't. You make efforts, I see them, I see you rolling your eyes and correcting yourself, making such a point of saying "When the wuman fae work marries a fella - OR a lassie". But then you chuckle. You look around as if to say it's PC gone mad. You relax into a statement that you're satisfied with - sure, love is love, you've no problems with them - but you're also relieved that it isn't something we have to deal with, not here. It's a city thing that we don't have to interact with. And you know the worst part, Mum? I laughed with you. I have been for years.

Every time I roll my eyes or giggle with you, I can feel myself getting slowly erased.

(getting gradually more frantic)

And the truth is, Mum, I'm scared that I'm never going to get myself back again. I'm scared that I'm gonny wake up one day and feel so numb that I can't feel anything anymore. I'm fucking scared, Mum, I'm lost. I don't know this part of the woods and you're not here to help me. I'm so lost.

They take a moment to compose themselves.

I can't even come to you with an answer yet. I don't know what I am. Whatever it is, it's not who you expect me to be. And I'm scared that if I tell you before I'm sure, then change my mind, you'll think I'm lying. I'm not lying. I'm not lying.

(with finality)

So that's why I need to go. I need to leave, I don't know where; Glasgow, Dundee, maybe even fuckin' Edinburgh, who knows. I don't want to get lost in a tiny village that I've walked through for my entire life.

I get that you could feel betrayed, or like I'm keeping things from you, and you're right. I am. But I know the second that the very moment you find out, I won't be the wean you raised.

I'll be some version of a person you know, not the wee girl walking through the woods and jumping over burns. And I'm not ready for you to lose that girl yet. Not just yet.

I'll come back, mum, I promise. I just can't right now.
I love y-

They trail off. They have tears in their eyes.
Slowly, they realise everything that came pouring out.
They stare of the phone screen for a minute.

They stop recording and delete the message.

New recording. *Leave a message after the tone.*

Hello, Anne, it's Jamie. Sorry for calling, but I just wanted to let you know I'm going away for a little bit. Nothing to worry about. I'll check in again soon. Bye.

Send.