

## 19 - Jumping Around

“Okay...” Dayna started from her rocking chair, postured like a queen before her masses, all condemned to diapers, bottles and sippy cups whilst she delivered her royal decree. Dawn listened to each and every familiar noise, though.

The laminate skin covering the book as it slightly crinkled from opening the book; a much more nostalgic noise than the kind of crinkling she was hearing from her neighbors practically every two seconds. The sound of a flipping page as the air caught underneath it was pushed and moved. It looked and sounded certainly like a real book. Maybe if she closed her eyes, she could disillusion herself into thinking that it was a normal book.

But imagining things was hard when reality kept knocking on the doorstep to her brain. The side of someone’s hand right next to her gently pressed against her temple as a not so quiet whisper was funneled into her ear.

*“I really like froggies!”* Kailey, the Little right next to Dawn admitted in a not so secret whisper, giggling, even.

And Dawn, too kind to kick a disenfranchised Little while they were still eternally down, offered a weak smile and nodded. “That’s...cool.”

It was a small gesture, but it made the girl shiver with excitement like she’d just formed an unbreakable bond with a new best friend. Dawn nearly tipped over to her side once Kailey nudged just a bit closer. Their hips were full on touching now, and the final adult of the two was trying to ignore whatever friendly actions she was trying to take. Even acknowledging Kailey was apparently enough to send the wrong signals, and yet flat out rejecting her felt horribly wrong.

“Dawn...?” A voice above the book in an actual quiet voice edged, and Dawn’s eyes drooped, seeing that it was Dayna addressing her. “I want to see that juice gone by the end of this story, okay?”

“I’ll finish it when I do...” Dawn quietly seethed, but just to get the Amazon off her back, she reluctantly lifted the bottle, turning her head away from the crowd just to sneak a suck.

“Okay, kids?” Dayna addressed everyone this time, trying to get back the oddly short attention spans from all the former adults sitting in attendance. “Are we ready for a story?”

“Yeessss!” all but Dawn cheered back in mismatching unison.

“Then let’s all be good boys and girls and be good listeners, okay?” Dayna asked clearly and carefully again, perching her hands on either end of the book.

“Okayyy!” Another response from the hive mind, and it only brought a toothy smile to the Amazon’s face.

“Okay...!” Dayna, the woman a day away from vacation, chuckled. Dawn cringed the moment she stared up at the woman, ordering and bossing her around. The eyes, the smile. The easy going attitude she had despite it being just another weekday of work. What did a little bit of trouble matter at a shift of work if it meant having a whole week– no, two? A holiday or a vacation right after? It suddenly made the day-to-day so easy and doable just from knowing that nothing but freedom and relaxation came right after it.

That was the problem, though. Dawn *got* it. She understood it. Staring up at the Amazon, for once a sickly feeling of empathy stabbed her like an invasive needle. It made her grimace, turning away for another swig of her bottle of juice. It made her feel weak. Incompetent. Disenfranchised and debilitated, sitting in a diaper at a storytime circle while the “adult” in the room told her how to act and behave.

Dayna got to be the king of the castle and was free after today. She was her own person, and right now that was so much more than Dawn could speak to. The only thing that slightly tugged her out of her mental misery right then was Dayna interrupting her thoughts with a beginning narrative.

“There once was a pretty little pond hiding away in a big green and lush forest! Snails, beetles, fish, dragonflies, and of course,” she paused for just a brief moment, just to look right at Kailey whose knees were already quivering excitedly, “frogs!” While they were asked to be quiet, that didn’t mean Littles weren’t allowed to express emotion, hence why Kailey could giggle and bounce without reserve.

“And in that pond...” Dayna went on, smiling over such an engrossed audience, “lived the bounciest, most jumpy frog there ever was; Jeremy!”

“Can we see? Can we see?” Kailey was practically begging, bouncing on her bottom and soon enough getting the other Littles to join in.

“You’ll all get to see, just be patient now!” Dayna laughed, and Dawn couldn’t look more disinterested. Nevertheless, she watched the Amazon turn around the large and wide story book, holding it lower to the ground to showcase the illustrations that she was privy to first.

It was a print of a watercolor painting of a pond inhabited by all its usual fauna and foliage. Fish were swimming, birds were chirping, ducks looked like they were quacking, and so forth. But of course they weren't the realest depictions of their counterparts. Rather, the illustrator must have decided beaks and bills could curve enough just to smile, and all eyes had pupils like people.

The showcase was long and slow, starting on one end of the crowd, slowly panning to the other end where Dawn was sitting. Heads and faces were turning and poking out just to watch the still image for as long as possible, leading to Kailey's head and hair knocking against Dawn who was trying not to bother looking.

But of course, Dayna stopped right when it reached Dawn. "Dawn, sweetie? Don't you wanna see the pictures?"

"I saw it a second ago." Dawn answered right back, looking squarely up at Dayna, specifically avoiding the book.

"No you didn't!" Joe Schmoe, the adult in diapers down the aisle, loudly accused her. "I saw!" he announced again that he saw what he didn't see. "She didn't look!"

"Liam?" Dayna butted in with a slightly stern voice, "We don't point at others."

"But she didn't...!" he whined right back, like it somehow mattered.

"And that's okay," Dayna said calmly right back.

Apparently now she was an advocate for Dawn which rubbed her the wrong way. A bitch was a bitch if she kept being a witch. Kindness killed the momentum and muddied the waters, but Dawn was still quite certain that she didn't like Dayna, just like every other Amazon, even if she kept bratty adults off her tail.

"But Dawn," *Ah, thank goodness. It's easy to hate her again.* "It's rude to turn your head when someone tries to show you something?"

"--But you *just* said I didn't have to?" Dawn blurted right back in an incredulous voice.

"Yes I did, but that doesn't mean you have permission to be rude," Dayna scolded her, and Dawn was fighting back the urge to use a vile set of words.

She had yet to say anything, but whatever story her face was telling, Dayna was picking up on it like blood in the water. “Dawn?” Dayna gave her a look, and Dawn was doing her best to internalize what was dying to burst out.

*Make good choices... Make stupid...fucking stupid good choices...*

Dawn exhaled instead of speaking, feeling all the eyes on her. The only reason she had no supporters nor opposition could have only been because of the Amazon sitting in the chair. Her words built a wall that kids were simply too trained, disciplined and scared to try climbing. The fact that her “peers” were victims to that same concept spoke volumes about how warped things were here.

She lifted her knees, laying her arms on them and finally perching her chin on them. Putting on her best ‘I’m totally not pissy voice’, she said, “Okay. I’m looking.” Her eyes were certainly pointed at the pages. Her face was undeniably aimed at the thing that Dayna was holding. But that was it. She wasn’t “seeing” anything. Nothing more than red, and her imagination speculating all the cool and cunning things that she could have said or could have done.

“Can we see the next page...?” Kailey asked Dayna in a shy voice, and whatever “smile” Dayna was giving Dawn, it looked a bit more genuine once the other Little was on the receiving end of it.

“Not until we read it, silly!” And like that, the tension was cut and Dawn was freed from the magnifying glass. Thank God for Kailey’s curiosity. But either way, even if Dawn was calming down, her bladder certainly wasn’t. It was feeling fuller and she was becoming more squeamish with each second. Internally, of course. That didn’t stop her from glancing at all the other littles, wondering for just a second in morbid and fearful curiosity.

*Do they actually...use them? Willingly?*

They had to. It was a given. The looks on their faces, the way they acted...they were so...*subdued*. Like nothing bothered them. Like this was normal. All of this. The treatment, the talks. Their clothes, their circumstances and undeniable demise. But confronting that apparently didn’t matter. Not when they had stories being read to them.

Not when they had stories, and not when Dawn had to stay under the radar that she was flying dangerously close to. Staring at her own personal demise, finally she lifted the bottle again, disappointing herself with the touch of a silicone nipple.

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“And Jeremy said to Mr. Birdy,” Dayna’s voice flipped from her narration to impersonation, and upped her pitch with a twinge of croak, “Why don’t you like to eat flies? They’re so yummy!”

And while the crowd erupted into a fit of giggles and laughs, half of Dawn’s brain was trying to see the humor in something so simple| while also trying to remain inconspicuous. She didn’t have much time, unfortunately. There wasn’t much to read on each page of the book, meaning they were fed quite often some sort of image to look at, just to tickle their curiosity into being excited for the next.

Big moments in the story had more than just Kailey bouncing now and the Little Learners Corner sounded like it was experiencing a localized thunderstorm

“Let us see!”

“We wanna see!”

“Please? Please?”

They’d stick their heads out with pleading eyes just to be the first to see what Dayna had to show. Dawn wasn’t coincidentally looking away anymore, but she was maintaining her practice of seeing “through” whatever fiction was being advertised to her..

“Boys, hands to ourselves, please!” Dayna would remind them unfortunately often, which referred to every time they were putting their hands on the legs of their neighbor just to lean over for a view of the book for longer.

“And then...*splat! Splat! Splat!*” Dayna’s voice popped with each audible sound effect, She showed the next image. Jeremy the frog demonstrated his culinary interests to his flying friend by feasting on the nearby flying insects with his super stretchy tongue.

“That one’s my favorite!” Kailey declared, bold enough to make such a claim before the book was even half over.

“No, the bird one was better!” Liam, the Little rediscovering a “phase” was busy with the ‘n’ word again.

Both spoke of their opinions like they were facts, and in that simplified context, maybe they weren’t far off from being actual adults after all. And Kailey, a devout believer in the church of froggies shouted right back, “*Nooo-uh!* Frogs are better!”

“No! Birds!”

“Kids?” Dayna tried cutting in, and Dawn was seeing an opportunity.

*Subtly... Slowly...* Finally she was feeling less of Kailey’s hip smooshed against hers as millimeter by millimeter she tried scooching across the carpet to a place where she could afford herself some privacy. Her time was limited as she could only keep her bladder calm for so long...

In a wild turn of events, Kailey’s head spun on Dawn, far too fired up to notice the couple of inches that’d formed between them.

“Dawn? Frogs are better, right?” She spoke like Dawn was a sister in arms ready to lay down her life for a greater cause. For the reputation of frogs that risked being removed from its pedestal by some annoying guy and his equally irrational and fanatical love for birds.

“Kailey? Liam? It’s okay to like *both*, you know?” Dayna reminded, but the two seemed steadfast in their claims.

*Yes...just keep arguing over stupid stuff some more... Almost!*

Now it was Dawn’s turn to watch Dayna like a hawk. She scrutinized where she looked and where she didn’t. Kailey and Liam were stubbornly debating to a point that Dayna finally interrupted to scold them both, leaving the other poor Little out of a story on account from the selfishness of two others.

Well, as Dawn finally leapt to her feet and scampered off to one of the bookshelves, she knew her time was limited, which is why she dropped to a squat, sighing as she tried to grunt and bear down what she wanted to stay inside of her. It was like running up against a wall, but it wasn’t strong when it was already cracked from having to sit still and keep on drinking juice. Finally a hot, uncomfortable spurt escaped her, and the stream started.

It flowed and seeped, absorbing and soaking her underwear, if only for a brief moment. It was quick but that didn’t make it any more emotionally painless. She was peeing herself. Wetting. Just like every Amazon wanted. Just like *fucking* Dayna wanted...!

She stood back up and felt her face quiver at the unusual warmth between her legs. She was wet, but she wasn’t. She couldn’t feel the liquid, but it’d been absorbed and wasn’t going anywhere.

Not until she got an exact replacement for what she'd do the same exact thing in. It was an unfortunate inevitability.

"Dawn?" And her time was up. "Honey? Where did you go?"

"Is she playing hide and seek?" Kailey, innocent and clueless, asked loudly and curiously.

"I'm here, I'm here," Dawn quickly spoke up once she reappeared and tried playing it cool. "What?"

"Dawn, the story isn't over yet, honey? Come sit down," Dayna beckoned her back on over, then noticed another thing. "Sweetie, why did you bring that book?"

Holding an excuse in her hands, Dawn glanced down at it. "Oh. I wanted to read something, so I went and grabbed it."

"But we're already reading something?" Dayna with her unending intellect countered her. "You can read that after. Come on back to the circle."

"But I finished my juice?" Dawn, picking up a bad habit, pointed at the empty bottle where she had been sitting. "So shouldn't I be able to go read my own stuff now?"

"Then we have to wipe your hands, sweetheart, so let's wait until this story's done so I can clean you up."

*Clean up.* What, did she roll through a mud puddle, or something? She certainly felt filthy given what the diaper she was wearing was like, but by Amazon standards she probably wasn't.

"Where are the wipes?" Dawn huffed, looking around for the dreaded diaper bag. "I'll wipe my own hands..."

But apparently Dayna wasn't as cunning as she made herself out to be. Either that or she didn't care to be particularly crafty. "Dawn, do I need to tell Mommy that you were misbehaving?" If she didn't feel like playing a game to convince Dawn of what the right thing to do was, she need only hang a stupid, pointless threat over her head.

She grit her teeth and they stared each other down for just a few seconds. Dawn opened her mouth and said, "Well, Dayna, I understand that it may seem like I'm misbehaving, but my *Mommy* wanted me to find a book on my own that I enjoyed? Unfortunately, I haven't found the right book yet, so it's *really* important I have some time to do that?"

“And you’ll have plenty of time to find a story that you like,” Dayna answered dismissively. “Do I need to count? Sit back in the circle, please.”

*Count?* A very frustrating memory resurfaced, and flashes of Katherine giving her the dreaded one-two-three which ultimately ended with her nose in the corner came back as well. An unbelievably unjust punishment that never survived the journey to a court of appeals that’d never support her cause.

It was a debatable act of kindness, given how atrocious all these books were, but Dawn had enough grace to set the book back down without dropping it disrespectfully, ultimately walking back to the circle, choking down a pissy look and attitude.

“Dawn...are you mad?” Kailey quietly whispered as the story continued.

“No...I’m fine.” Dawn tried to dismiss her as best as she could.

“...Okay...”

And back to her thousand yard stare she went, feeling more and more disturbed the longer she had to sit with a warm pad pressing against her behind.

On and on the story went. More and more pictures that Dawn pretended to see. She was quiet and emotionless, letting the time pass by as her brain starving for meaningful stimulation rotted away.

And finally...

“And Jeremy hopped back to his home in the pond, happy as could be!” Dayna declared, softly shutting the book.

*Finally...it’s over....*

“Can we read another one?” The other boy who had yet to be openly named asked the question.

And unfortunately his opinion wasn’t unpopular.

“Yeah! I wanna read another!”

“Can we? Please?!”



The Littles were begging and Dawn was revolting. Another one? Another stupid, simple and dumb story that had nothing to teach other than what *maybe* lived in a pond? Kailey got her stupid high from hearing a book about frogs, so why did she need any more?!

But before things could sway too much, Dawn quickly piped up. “Dayna? Can you wipe my hands first?”

Dayna’s head swiveled and followed each person who had something to say, giving them the attention their words probably didn’t deserve, but she was impartial anyway. “Tell you what, we’ll read another one soon, okay? You all must be pretty thirsty, huh?” She stood from the rocking chair, dusting off her spotless skirt. “Why don’t we get you all something to drink for a little bit then we can choose another?”

“Okayyy!”

Dawn was the first of the Little few on her feet and tailed Dayna like a caboose over to the line of diaper bags on the book shelf.

“Oops! Careful, Dawn!” Dayna chuckled as she turned, nearly colliding with the relatively tiny woman. “Coming through!” she walked ahead of her, baby bottles and sippy cups in hand. “Let’s see...this one is for Liam...” she muttered as she distributed, and Dawn impatiently waited for her to finish. But as she did so, Dawn noticed each trip to give something to a Little ended with circling right behind them. Peeling back pants or lifting the hem of a short dress. Padded rumps and plastic white flashed on each and every one of them as Dayna wordlessly administered a diaper check to each and every one of them.

Not only that, but Dawn looked far from happy to see a bottle with an all too familiar juice inside of it. She was one Little away from supposedly being done, yet she had that bottle of juice and a sippy cup that she knew wasn’t hers.

As ignorant as Dawn was to this world, she wasn’t foolish enough to not notice a deal that wasn’t being upheld. Not only that, but she was bound to be getting a diaper check, and that meant...

“Dawn?” Dayna was already in front of her, holding out the bottle.

“Wh...what? I’m full,” Dawn promptly refused and declined. “I don’t want any more juice.” This was somewhat true, actually.

“But you may want it later?” Dayna tempted and deceptively omitted the consequences of taking such a thing.

“Maybe later, but not now. Besides, you said you’d wipe my hands after the story so I can go read my *own* stuff?”

“Sweetie, I promise there’s going to be time for that later?”

Voila. The goalposts did in fact move.

“I want to read books by myself. Now. You promised,” Dawn tried to reason, having nothing more than Dayna’s supposedly good word to fight against. Yet it all felt like a game that she was destined to lose.

“Dawn...” Dayna’s patience was dwindling with each consonant as she crouched to her knees, holding out the bottle like a literal olive branch; one that was only a benefit to one party. “Take your juice.”

But Dawn had been pushed enough. The consequences of telling Katherine exactly what happened were starting to bother her less and less now. If she was told exactly what happened, maybe, just *maybe* Katherine would be on her side, or at least incredibly lenient. Dayna wasn’t playing fair and she knew it, and therefore Dawn was undoubtedly in the right.

“No.”

“No?” Dayna repeated. “Do I need to count?”

And feeling especially annoyed, Dawn fumed as passively as she could right back by spouting, “One. Two. Three. There, I counted for you. I said I didn’t want any juice, and I’m not listening to another story. I’m trying to be as nice as I can right now, but you’re making that pretty difficult...!”

Her argument was a mix of reasoning and sass, and unfortunately just a drop of that was all she needed to spoil her entire case, assuming there would even be one without. Dayna’s eyes went wide with surprise, likely astounded that Dawn had the audacity to be so bold.

“That is *no* way to talk to a grownup, young lady!” Sure enough, Dayna wasn’t happy. “Dawn, you march your bottom over here right this instant!”

She wanted her within arms reach, and the implications of that made her shiver.

“A... absolutely not,” Dawn muttered as she stepped back. “I-I made a fair point! You said I only had to listen to one story! If I take that juice I have to sit in that stupid circle again!”

“We do not say ‘stupid’!” Dayna reprimanded. “Dawn, do I need to come over there, or are we going to be a good girl and do as we’re told?”

“I’m *doing* exactly what you promised me! Waiting for my hands to be cleaned so I can read a book!”

“Does this mean I’m going to have to tell your Mommy how you’ve been misbehaving for me?” There it was, her best weapon to “control” Dawn.

But the novelty was gone and its excessive use dulled the edge it once had. Whether that meant Dawn was the idiot for no longer caring didn’t change what she was going to do. Constant exposure made her forget the fear, which is why she crossed her arms.

“Yeah, I guess so.”

There was a gasp, but neither from Dawn nor Dayna. Kailey, though, held her hands up to her mouth, watching with a sippy cup sneaked away in the crook of her arm, watching like it was a soap opera.

“Kailey, sweetheart?” Dayna turned her head, back to a professional smile that Dawn was learning to be maybe not as sincere as she once originally thought. “Could you go play with Liam and Tommy, please? Dawn and I need to have a little chat.”

A chat. Alone? With *her*? She spun her head, looking for a witness that wouldn’t be willing to disappear at just the beck and call of an Amazon, much less one with a nametag. But it was just them as Kailey quickly crinkled off.

“Okay...I’ve tried being nice, young lady...” Dayna started as she started to stand.

The moment she took her first towering, country-crossing step forward, Dawn worriedly blurted out, “I-I want Mommy!”

Dayna froze, but only for a second. “Mommy’s not here right now. Does she need to know that you’ve been bratty for me this whole time?”

“I...I don’t care! I want...I want Katherine!” It was an instinctual response that she was praying for like a get out of jail free card. Well, maybe not get out of jail, but escape whatever shit she’d just brewed with Dayna. But it wasn’t fair...! She did everything she was supposed to! Dawn quickly paced back, finally to the point that she was practically jogging down the aisles just to avoid Dayna.

“Dawn, come here right this instant!”

“No!” Dawn yelled back, occasionally weaving past the few Littles in the pen.

*Shit! Shit!* Why was this happening? Was she going to be punished? Was a literal stranger going to spank her? Spanking or not, she certainly wasn’t letting someone touch her privates or go anywhere near her nether regions. No matter how much Katherine and James liked to overstep her boundaries, it didn’t make it any more okay than when they did it. But Dayna, someone who Dawn had even less experience with; none, actually, she had absolutely *no* right to that. Besides, wasn’t she doing far more than Katherine asked her to?

Either way, she refused to be caught and she was willing to do anything to avoid it. She just needed something clever, because the only thing she had was playing musical chairs around a few different bookshelves that gave her enough time to outmaneuver Dayna. In theory, at least.

It wouldn’t last for long though, which is why her frantic and panicked mind resorted to a simple, stupid, yet hopefully effective trick.

Kailey was coming up as Dawn sprinted with a crinkle, busy sucking down her sippy cup as she watched curiously while the Little on the run raced right by her.

Like a soft glancing blow, Dawn’s hand shot out, lightly tapping Kailey’s bare shoulder while she zoomed on through. Only after she was about to round the corner again, she shouted:

“TAG! You’re it!”

For maybe just a fraction of a second she thought it hadn’t worked, like somehow she just tempted an adult into a juvenile game that no one would fall for. No one other than an actual kid, obviously.

But Kailey in the grand scheme unfortunately met Dawn’s expectations. Not more than a fraction of a second and it was a shrill, disappointed gasp from the girl.

“*Heyyyy...!* You didn’t say we were playing!” Kailey cried, but Dawn could hear the girl on her feet. Maybe she was chasing after Dawn, or maybe she wasn’t. She couldn’t have been that committed though because next Dawn heard her shout the same mantra, only it wasn’t Dawn she’d touched.

Now another Little was part of the game, and quickly another. Soon enough a whole flock of Littles were racing around the corner like it was chaos.

“Tag!”

“Tag, you’re it!”

“No backsies!”

“Liam’s it! Liam’s it!”

It didn’t change that Dayna wanted Dawn, but the learning corner was only so big. It didn’t change that the Amazon with only so much vision around entire bookshelves had to start being wary of darting Littles that could or could not have been the one she was looking for.

“Kids? Boys, girls, this isn’t where we play tag! It’s snack time, remember? Don’t you want another story?” Dayna tried to appeal to their sense of reason, but clearly she’d forgotten that somewhere along the way it’d been killed like their probable distaste for diapers. Pandemonium ensued and the one woman in charge couldn’t convince them to cease the commotion.

Dawn paused and raced, finding just the right moments to dart from one spot to another. She avoided Dayna much more deftly now, especially with a few other diversions racing around. They giggled and laughed, and Dayna was trying to scold and be stern, but it was hardly working.

But the madness could only last for so long.

“Boys, girls?” Dayna raised her voice, much more than she had before. It was iron-willed and stern, and the giggles and laughs stopped almost immediately. The pattering of feet stopped instantly and the game died on the spot. “Do I need to tell your Mommies and Daddies that you’ve been misbehaving?” She waited for just a few seconds, letting the suspense sink into their fragile hearts.

“Do I?” Her head panned across the room, like she was looking for someone to call her bluff. Probably someone other than Dawn, who was still at large, now hiding out of sight. There were quiet murmurs and whimpers. While a resistance was started quickly, so too was it killed.

“Dayna?” A voice out of sight spoke, and salvation had been reached. “Is everything okay?”

She needn’t hear another word. Dawn was careful to take the right path down an empty aisle, slipping by Dayna and right for the exit.

The joy in her voice was really just the relief from narrowly avoiding punishment, as Dawn cheered, “Katherine!” She raced right up to her and planted her feet right by the Amazon’s side, looking nothing but surprised.

“Katherine?” Dayna from the other end repeated, sounding with a bit of disbelief. “Katherine, you let her call you that?”

The Amazon far too late to the party with none of the story blinked, then stuttered, “N-no, I...it’s something we’re working on, so... Is...is something wrong?”

Dawn’s eyes met Dayna’s for just a second, then she looked back up at the other giantess and spoke. “Well yes, actually... Katherine, I’m sorry, but your daughter has been misbehaving.”

“What?” Katherine sounded surprised, and the tone actually made Dawn feel uneasy, like it’d suddenly become an open and shut case without any presentation of the facts.

But before the train could run away with the verdict, Dawn blurted back, “No! She’s lying! Kath...” Dawn started to say, but she could see the wrinkle in Katherine’s brow, “M-Mommy!” Whatever it took to win her over. “I’ve *been* doing what she’s asked, but she’s doing stuff she’s not supposed to!”

For a second Katherine glanced over at her coworker, then down back at the Little. “Like what?”

“She doesn’t have permission, but she was touching me! She was giving me juice when I didn’t ask for it, and she’s been forcing me to sit and listen to stories instead of letting me read! She doesn’t have permission to do that! I gave in and did what she wanted, but she’s not even being fair! She said I could read after, but she’s just gonna make me listen to another one instead!”

“Katherine,” Dayna’s words stepped right over Dawn’s, “She was using a little bit of language, as well...”

“*Dawn!*” And yet somehow the tables had been turned entirely. It wasn’t even a defense. It wasn’t a rebuttal. Her argument was side-stepped just so this underhanded Amazon could claim something even more damning.

The disapproval in Katherine’s voice made Dawn recoil, but she doubled down. “She’s *lying!* Yes! I said ‘stupid’ *once!* But that’s not language, or whatever *stupid* thing you guys call it! Naughty words? I’ve been behaving! I’ve been calling you *Mommy!* All I want in return is peace and quiet! I don’t want to deal with someone like her!” she shouted, stomped and pointed at the other Amazon, finally pissed as could be.

“*She...!* She was going to *check* me! Then she was going to change me, and she’s not allowed to do that! No one is! I said ‘no’ and she wouldn’t listen! I...I tried! I really did!” She did try! She really fucking did!

Dayna stepped forward, walking over to the Amazon and Little, and Dawn immediately backpedaled herself behind Katherine’s leg like an immovable object she could chain herself to.

“Katherine, I can take care of her, okay? I know you’re busy, so just let me handle this?” Dayna offered, and Dawn was feeling more genuine fear to be trapped with this woman by the second.

And as horrible as it felt to say, or to ask or maybe even beg, Dawn muttered, “*Mommy...please.*”

Dawn’s defense had crumpled. Her legs that she used as walls turned around and crumbled, but only because an arm swept her from behind to lift her up, taking her to the same heights as the one she wanted nothing to do with.

“I appreciate it, Dayna, but I think I’m gonna take an early lunch.” Katherine smiled at her hesitant coworker, stepping into the penned area just to lift her deposited bag from the shelf. “Are those one of her bottles?” Katherine asked, pointing out what Dayna had in her hand.

“It is,” Dayna answered, handing it over. “But Katherine, I really don’t mind watching her?”

“I know you don’t, and I’m sure I’m gonna have to impose on you again,” Katherine spoke as she adjusted Dawn in her arm, more thankful than she would have liked to have been liberated. “I just think she needs some downtime right now, though. I’m sorry for giving you such a handful!” Dawn didn’t care if she was a handful. Whatever it took to be left alone.

“It’s fine, really!” Dayna waved her hand, looking pleased to find something related to workplace banter again.

“Thank you for watching her! If you’ll excuse me, I’m going to start that lunch break early!” Katherine announced, and with a miraculous turn of events, she was free.

“Th...thank you...” Dawn whispered against Katherine. The atmosphere and the situation had become far too much for her to handle. That instance of tag was her final wind at trying to prolong an inevitable horror she wasn’t ready to face. It may have been instigated by herself, but it wasn’t right that she had to bend over backwards for everything...!

“K-Katherine, I promise, I was doing what I was supposed to! I-”

“Dawn, please? Please call me Mommy?” Katherine reminded. It wasn’t directly from a place of wanting it for herself, but the undertones of conformity and appearance were also there. But most importantly, it was something that’d been asked of the Little, and she needed to do everything she could to maintain Katherine’s good graces. While she saved her, she didn’t look the happiest, either.

“*Mommy*,” Dawn spoke with the same emphasis, “I...I tried...! She...she just wasn’t cooperating!”

“Dawn...” Katherine sighed, taking them someplace where there were no people, of which Dawn noticed there seemed to be considerably more now. “I’m...I’m sure you did what you thought was right, but you know you can’t misbehave for other grownups.”

“I wasn’t...!” Dawn tried to stress. “I did what I was supposed to! I listened! I drank from those bottles when she gave them to me, even when I didn’t ask for them! She kept touching my diaper even when I told her not to! I was looking through those dumb books just to find something that I could tell you about! Like *we* promised! She made me put them down just to sit in a circle and listen to a story I didn’t even want to read! I did all of that! I did all of it for *YOU!*” Dawn finally heaved, feeling the air leaving her lungs.

“And...and when I finally said no...!” she winced, and hating herself for it, she sniffled.

“She...she was gonna punish me... I was scared. I was so...so scared...!” It was James all over again. The painful spanking. The soap in her mouth. Kelly taking her clothes. Kelly smothering her face with hand soap, degrading her in front of the mirror in the bathroom... A needle up her ass, and all the same humiliation she had faced with that plump woman in the bathroom. The very first thing that sent her down this mortifying, unforgiving spiral.



She did it all to avoid *that*. To avoid all those things that made her into the mess she was, and trained her to be so fearful of every single person more than double her height. Her hands were clutching the fabric of Katherine's uniform, and before she knew it her eyes were watering.

Everything thus far had made her doubt this world and everything that came with it. Everyone included. Katherine was no different, no more than what circumstances afforded her. If Dawn took just a second to think, she could conveniently turn this woman into yet another object of hatred, distrust and fear, but her selfish and frazzled nature is all that she needed to ignore the truth. Even if it was temporary, despite what Katherine had done herself, it wasn't enough to deter Dawn from thinking she was safe for at least a little bit.

Katherine would scold her. She'd be stern and rocksteady. She could give punishments and she could be bossy. She lied and she was deceptive, but in spite of that she was still willing to offer mixed messages disguised as kindness, and Dawn wanted to be the fool. Just for a little bit, she wanted to fall for the illusions and convince herself that this was a refuge.

The hand on her back under the right lens was caring and assuring, and the crook between her neck and shoulder with the right filter was a safe haven for her head. If Katherine wanted to trick her, Dawn would trip over every wire and step on every plate. Anything if it meant taking just doses of Katherine's reality, and none from no one else. Just while her mind and body recovered.

And her ache subsided for just a second once she felt the woman's squeeze. "We're gonna talk about this in a little bit. Understood?"

"Uh huh..."

In just a moment of weakness, Dawn could feel the fingers hook the back of her diaper and jeans, tugging them back. It was foolish, delusional and pathetic, but the only thoughts that registered in the Little's mind was that it wasn't Dayna. It wasn't some complete stranger. It was someone she didn't want looking at her private places, but it was the same person she was seeking rescue from.

The words made her feel small and shudder, but that was it. Nothing more, nothing less. The thought of how much more it could have been with Dayna made her feel far more uncomfortable.

"Just a little wet..."