

28 - Happily Ever After

“BUT I WANT *THAT* ONE!” a shrill-voiced sobbing boy cried. His tiny voice from his tiny body cut through ears like a hot knife through butter. His sobbing tantrum bounces off the skyscraper shelves and even up to the rafters of the humongous warehouse store.

Right after a small, quiet exhale, the Amazon mother with her hand firmly over her son, repeated in a level, absolute voice, “Billy, no. Remember what Mommy said? You can choose the police car or the fire truck. The other one is too expensive.”

“BUT I *WANT* IT...!” he screamed again, like words could rewrite the universe or put more dollars in his parent’s purse. With every eruption from his heaving chest he stomped his velcro sneakers into the shiny, milky floor where faint reds and blues would reflect from the lights coming off his hyperactive heels.

“Do you need to go potty?” the woman asked. “Is that what’s going on?”

“N-*Nooo!*!” he’d cry again, and Dawn certainly heard more, but the clarity was fleeting as they walked further away. It was drowned out by store ambience playing over the endless amount of speakers, other kids and Littles having either emotional outbursts or mental breakdowns, all on top of the meager 1% busy making noises from all the samples.

Push me! Hear me play a song!

Try twisting!

Press here for fun!

And so on.

“It’s so noisy...” Dawn muttered under her breath, but even when Katherine wasn’t carrying her she always seemed to have heightened senses.

“That’s just everybody having fun with their toys!” Katherine happily suggested. So as to say: *there is no unhappiness in Libertalia.*

“Let’s just order something online...” she groaned as she looked around. “Can we just go to the book store instead?”

“Don’t be so silly~” Katherine chuckled.

“You, Kat, and your books...” James sighed with Dawn in his arms. “Y’know hon, I think maybe you both could benefit from some different kind of stimuli.”

“I do lots of other things, thank you very much,” Katherine put on a playfully indignant look. “And Dawn does too, you know? Which is *why* we’re gonna find a few things we like to play with today, right?” she pinched the shoulder of Dawn’s shirt.

“Dunno,” Dawn sounded far from enthusiastic. “Kind of hard to say when I haven’t gotten the chance to read a single thing whatsoever.”

“What?” James had a grin of disbelief. “You’re telling me that you spent the whole day in a library and didn’t read one thing?”

“Nope,” Dawn shook her head. “Not when there’s stupid—”

“Ah-ah?” James and Katherine tutted in unison. “Dawn, hey, no more bad words,” James finished the rest.

“...” naturally, the Little looked nothing but pissy, albeit in a dry diaper. “*Rules* that make absolutely zero sense and have absolutely *zero* need to exist in the first place.”

“I really think if we gave some of the Little books a try though you’d like them a lot, sweetheart...” Katherine said encouragingly.

“Yeah, well, when can I read the one you checked out? Can I just read that tonight?”

“We’ll definitely make time for that,” Katherine said in the same breath she snuck a hand through Dawn’s hair. “Oh! Look at these!”

A shelf of different fuzzy, furry animal creatures were stacked from end to end. Parrots, Bears, Dogs, Cats, Elephants, and even turtles all stemmed from the same bulbous form.

“Oh hey, I think I saw a commercial for these?” James looked at it with just as much curiosity. Dawn, however, stayed as distant as she mentally could.

“Look at these, Dawn!” Katherine enthusiastically grabbed one off the shelf. She held it nice and close while she read the packaging.

“What even is it?” Dawn finally asked, deciding it might be easier to humor her just so she could turn it down even faster.

“It’s a Speak-and-Play!” Katherine smiled down at the robotic creature. “They’re little friends that help teach you all kinds of important stuff, play games with you and even give prizes!”

“That’s cool, but sorry, not really my thing,” Dawn started to back off of it fast and quick. If only the sparkle in Katherine’s eyes would go away. “Can’t I just get a ball, or something?”

“If we don’t keep it somewhere safe, Waver’s gonna think that it’s a toy for him,” James shot her suggestion down fast, and Katherine whole-heartedly agreed.

“I actually really like the idea of this,” Katherine doubled down in her own delusions. “Which one do you want, Dawn?”

“None of them.”

“If I’m the one that chooses, you might not like what I pick, you know...?” Katherine tried to tempt the urks and urges that didn’t exist in a mature adult like Dawn, but it didn’t stop her coaxing regardless.

“The faster you pick, the faster we can look at other stuff, you know,” James also added, and finally someone spoke to reason.

“Just...” Dawn sighed, disappointed to actually waste energy on turning her head at the selection. Finally, she stuck out a finger. “That one.” She’d get it, but no one said that she actually has to use it, right?

“Awh! They’re adorable!” Katherine was fast with the exchange, and suddenly a red fox with stubby legs was plopped in the cart. “I like that one a lot. Good choice!”

Unfortunately, many things went into the cart in a similar fashion. Either James or Katherine would make a comment, Dawn would begrudgingly acknowledge it, and ultimately whether she liked it or not, she either chose what she got or they chose for her.

PlayClay. Colorful and creative modeling stuffs highly similar to something back home. It was probably the most inoffensive thing they had gotten that Dawn could stomach. Not literally, of course. Partly noted because of Katherine’s unfortunate insistence on it *not* being a food. Like Dawn needed the reminder.

Some shape insertion game. It looked offensively simple, but even Dawn from an objective standpoint was a little impressed... It came with squares, rectangles, stars, circles, rhombi, hexagons, pentagons, and more. The stencils and frames apparently changes to form complex polygons that the shapes combined to make... The fact that there was any interest in it made Dawn shudder.

Plush animals with big heads and tiny bodies. Soft stuff just meant to fill a space like pillows could, only something far cuter for the Amazons to see. Maybe Waver could do her a solid and steal them all as chew toys.

Soon enough Dawn didn't even have to give input anymore. Katherine was driven and grabbing whatever she thought looked even remotely exciting.

"I wonder who the toys are for now, huh?" James chuckled, and only after a long silence of Katherine not responding, he shuffled his arms. "Hey, you okay?"

"What?" Dawn turned her head up. "Yes...I'm fine. Wait- were you talking to me?"

"Yes, I was talking to you," he laughed. "Did you see something Kat hasn't grabbed already?"

"Nope. Definitely not," Dawn kept turning her head for something interesting that wasn't demoralizing. "Can you just put me down? Please? I want to walk."

"Yeah? Stretch your legs a little?"

"Something like that."

And the first thing James did was look at either end of the aisle, finding that no one was with them. Another few seconds after that Dawn slowly descended to the ground.

"Stay right in front of us, okay?" James warned.

"Yeah, yeah, I will," Dawn droned on, but she was suspended in mid air upon finishing her words. "Okay! I promise! I'll stay in front of you!" Only then did her feet touch the ground.

James then went an extra step and fished through the diaper bag sitting in the carriage.

"Have this too," he gave her a sippy cup filled with juice. "And no; no saying you're not thirsty," he grinned like he stopped a trap before it could be sprung. He finally rose back to his feet.

Trying to ignore the latter half, Dawn simply stretched in place, leaning from side to side as she tried to ignore her crinkles and prominent bum shifting all at the same time.

“Hon?” If there was anything that could snap Katherine out of a craze, surely it was seeming to be Dawn’s dangerous potential in unsupervised activity.

“She knows to stay right here with us,” James assured, but even without an explicit look Dawn could already feel the ever-present heat of a spotlight over her head now.

“Are we done picking stuff out yet?” Dawn didn’t try very hard to mask how fed up she was getting, what with each step being a loud slap on the floor from raising each foot like they were a guillotine.

“Did you see something you wanted to pick out?” Katherine was already squatting beside the girl.

“No,” Dawn flatly replied. “I’m fine. I don’t need toys. I want books. That’s all I want.”

“Let’s go look at the next aisle,” Katherine spoke, and Dawn could always tell it was meant for James when it was one octave lower, AKA her normal voice, like Dawn was always the one needing positive stimuli. “Dawn? Can you please hold James’ hand?”

“It’s not like I’m disappearing, I’ll be fine.” That being said, she may have sipped from her sippy for possibly just a few more brownie points...

“Dawn?” Katherine asked again, and with far less opportunity for negotiation. Just her name meant either Katherine’s way or the highway. High in this case meaning back to being carried. Or in the carriage.

“Promise my hands are clean,” James added with a bit more wit, like a drop of water moistening the absolute desert of destitute Katherine was plaguing the Little with.

It wasn’t without an eye wiggle and not so quiet sigh when she slapped her five digits into the palm of James’.

“Are we done yet?” Dawn moaned at some point.

“Nope, not yet,” James would reply.

“Now?” Dawn would ask with every toy that got dropped into the cart.

“I wanna find you just a few more things...” Katherine would quietly hush without even giving her eye contact.

“Okay, so now then?” Dawn would once again ask after a ‘few more things’ later. But alas,

“Sweetheart?” Katherine was squatting in front of Dawn with a calm, patient look, but the tone was enough to tell her that there was about to be some kind of “talk”. “When you try and rush people like that, it can be very rude. Can you please stop asking us to leave? It’ll go by faster if you help pick out some toys you’d like?”

Far less than impressed, Dawn looked back at her with a blank stare. “Fine. I’ll take a tablet.”

But there was enough mutual understanding for Katherine to simply exhale through her nose and stand back up. They went their separate ways as Dawn paced around James, kicking invisible dirt and screeching her sneakers across the floor in the same process.

And a calm voice caught her from behind.

“Hey,”

Out of reflex Dawn turned, but quickly wished that she hadn’t.

A silicone bulb pierced between her lips as her teeth were forced apart and a plastic shield moved up and against her cheeks. Shock was her first expression, then anger followed by Katherine pulling her empty hand back.

“I don’t like the attitude I’m hearing from you right now,” Katherine sounded stern, but even then inklings of hurt were dribbling through. “When that comes out I only want to hear the good girl that I know you can be, understood?”

And goodness was Dawn ready to scream. She bit down hard on the rubbery teat. She tried grinding it to shreds and smithereens just to spite the Amazon.

Who in the hell did she think she was? Just shoving random shit in Dawn’s mouth like that?! And where did she even get the fucking pacifier?! Now? Or, actually, wait. Probably the *last* time that they were here. Great. So fucking great. She could barely speak. It was all muffled. Muted. Dealt with. Katherine effectively put her on mute.

And what sucked the most is that there weren't any tricks. Nothing directly stopping her from pulling it out and slapping it on the floor. Nothing but the looming threat of what'd already been used against her. Revoking privileges. Sticking her nose in the corner. Forcing her to sit in the carriage. Coating her mouth in soap, and worst of all, a bare-bottomed spanking. Funny to think how being small enough makes all those sorts of things range anywhere from extremely inconvenient to belittling to downright painful.

She had a choice. She *could* be malicious. She could be verbal and she could be audibly angry. But then what? The stupid thing gets forced back between her lips and she gets another very real demerit on her record? Momentary rebellion in exchange for unfortunately very real consequences. Fucking great.

The moment she screamed or bit back, that was the end. That was...

A great segue into her next idea.

James turned his head at something small and light hitting the floor.

He looked and he sighed. "Dawn..." calmly, he bent over.

"Huh?" and innocently, Dawn turned her head. The Amazon's hand proffered what was once in her mouth, right after wiping it down, of course.

"Katherine said not to take this out, remember?"

"Oh, yeah," Dawn answered, albeit with a far different kind of tone. "Sorry, guess I got distracted and it fell out." She took the pacifier back quite begrudgingly, even if her face wasn't showing it. "Sorry." With great willpower she popped it back into her mouth.

She didn't suck on it, heaven's no, but she kept her face visible long enough for James to be satisfied. Soon he was back to talking with Katherine.

And Dawn was back to...

Plunk.

"In your mouth, please," Katherine was next to softly reprimand the girl, but it was far from scolding precisely because of the way the Little was reacting.

“Oh, did I drop it?” Dawn put on her next excuse, though Katherine was already taking advantage of an open mouth.

And over the course of about fifteen minutes, it went on like that for three more times or so. Just a poor, distracted Little far too focused on her surroundings to really care whether she was keeping something in her mouth. Without throwing a tantrum there wasn't any ammo for James and Katherine to truly be angry. Trying their patience? Sure as hell she was, but she was certainly keeping them on their toes.

The steps were easy, really. So easy even an actual toddler could do it. Take a few steps. Turn her head away from the Amazons, then sloooowly squeeze her mouth shut...push on the bulb with her tongue...come out from her teeth, start to slide against her wet lips, and...!

Plunk! That was the sound Dawn heard in her head.

Not on the floor.

Maybe she really was just distracted, because she failed to notice the open hand waiting just underneath her chin. She blinked, then looked up at James.

“Sorry, I got distracted.” But who was to stop a mischief-maker from doubling down?

“So we've noticed,” James chuckled back, but on some level Dawn was imagining that they were wisening up to her tricks. Both parties knew the reality, but they both honored the rules. Dawn was simply playing the metagame. So it was a challenge, then? So be it. “You know, you don't have to use this as long as you behave?”

In other words, he was looking for a confession. A pledge to be good like the “good little girl” they expected her to be. Too bad he was barking up the wrong tree. Hell, the wrong fucking forest.

“Mmm...” and Dawn pursed her lips, tucking her hands behind and back, and to finish it off—with a shrug, she said, “Yeah, but I dunno? After all, you two *totally* seem to know what's best.” Okay, yeah, she definitely let her attitude leak there, but damn did it feel good. “W-wait, huh?” Her borderline shit-eating grin was gone when Katherine was suddenly pinching the tuft of her shirt.

“Hold still for me, please?” she had something in her hands as she fussed with her fingers, and Dawn instinctively tried to move back, but Katherine wasn't letting her go whether she wanted to move or not.

It was plastic and circular, or at least that's what the base looked like. When Katherine's hand drew back the small pad was resting her her shirt and just above her breast where it laid flat.

"And then this goes on..." in far less time there was a solidifying click against her new hardware and a mint green strap dangled from whatever was glued to her shirt. The strap couldn't have been long enough to reach her belly button, but the dangling strap had another clasp on the end of it. "And then we do this part next," Katherine narrated while she took the mute button from James and hooked its ring on the strap. "Perfect!" Katherine smiled, and Dawn was still processing just how badly she had just been cheated.

"Wait? What?" Dawn grabbed the pacifier dangling from her shirt. She tried to hold it out, but the strap quickly went taut before she could even fully stretch her arm. "What is this?!" she angrily tugged, but the badge on her shirt tugged the cloth and eventually herself.

"The floor has lots of germs so we can't keep dropping your paci," Katherine explained while her hands tucked a small box of packaging away.

"W-wait, you just grabbed this now?!" *Think Dawn! Think!* "Y-you...you're not allowed to do that!"

"Don't worry, we'll pay for it with everything else."

"I...!" Fuck, how could she not have seen this coming? Better yet, how was she supposed to undo this? "I don't want this! Take it off!"

"It's not bothering you," Katherine decided her feelings for her and James wasn't leaning any way but his wife's either.

"Don't worry, this way you can be a little distracted," James smiled, and Dawn couldn't tell whether she was being mocked or her lies were truly believed. Fuck. Christ. Shit.

With a disgusted look she dropped the pacifier, and promptly the short strap gently swung it back against her body. Grunting annoyedly, she tried to dig her fingers underneath the plastic plate on her shirt, but the seam felt practically nonexistent.

"Please don't play with that," Katherine gently moved her hands away, and no matter the attitude the Little was throwing, Katherine kept raining down on it with her grounded attitude. "Are we done with this?" she asked as she already took the mostly empty sippy cup from her, but all Dawn was doing was trying to get the pacifier clip off of her. How did the clasp even come

undone? Forget getting the whole tether off her shirt, she couldn't even figure out how to get the worst part of it off...!

The strap wasn't even long enough to properly hold in her hand! The moment she extended her arm was the same time she ran out of strap. All she could do was let it dangle like it wasn't her problem, or keep it in her mouth because of-fucking-course.

And in not so much of a whisper, James chatted with his wife, "Maybe we should reconsider that nap after we leave...?"

"No!" Dawn raised her voice again. "I'm not taking a nap!" And quite unfortunately, with zero logic and reason to rely on, she used the one tool she had at her disposal. It felt pitiful just to say, which is why her tone wasn't pleased in using it. "Y-you...! You said so...!"

"We did say so," Katherine nodded, answering both her husband and their Little at the same time. "But you need to show us that you can handle going without one, okay?"

Her toes were curling like baring white hot knuckles. "I *can* handle it! I've always been able to! Why do I have to prove something that I already know that I can do?! Why-?!"

She tried to go on with her fuming pleas, yet her straining vocals were suddenly at odds with someone even louder and more distressed.

"NO! PLEASE! PUT IT BACK! PUT IT BACK! I DON'T NEED ONE! I'LL BE GOOD! PLEASE...! PLEASE...!" And among the shrill cries and wailing moans passing by, naturally misery came in company with condescending attitudes, which is why the Amazon leading the charge to their doom hummed back all the way from their pedestal.

"Gosh, you Littles can be so fussy! I'm not the one who pooped my pants, right? Is it fair for a real grown-up to trust a little boy who can't keep their own pants dry?" there wasn't an audible response, none other than a mocking chuckle doubling down. "And don't think Mommy forgot about that bite you gave me. Doctor Straus will..." while there was morbid curiosity in wondering just how such a sadistic string of words could possibly end, it worked far better to cut the cord than let it fester. The Amazon and Little duo drifted away, wherever they were, taking all the steam with her.

"T...take it off...!" Dawn balled her hands, annoyed and desperate with her eyes glued on both husband and wife. Yet it was hardly an argument, or one that came off as convincing.

“It stays on,” Katherine firmly decided, though without the malice that would have made retaliation just a little bit easier. “And use our inside voices, please.”

First she forcibly silenced the girl, then she put an irremovable gag on her. She teased her with a toilet, making her shit herself all the same, then forced her to stand in the same spot while an Amazon enjoyed the privilege of taking their business to a toilet, and not walking around in it to be saved for later. Katherine didn't have to deal with a crinkle and bulk between her legs. She didn't have to worry about having a waddle, or suddenly being stopped for a diaper check like it was a strip search.

Now they were stuck in a toy store under the guise of being “all for Dawn,” all the while she kept on refusing and insisting that none of it was anything she wanted. When did she finally get her treat today? What part about this was meant to be enjoyable?

She had the look. She had the flame, the fire. Her shoes that she didn't tie herself were squeaking under the pressure her feet were pushing into the floor. Her arms were heavy, iron rods weighing into her sides as her shoulders went tense and rock solid. Steam blew from her nose, and fear was fast forgotten in the face of pure bull-shittery.

“*Fuck yo—!*” Yet her burning fuse was quickly pinched. By none other than...herself.

Guilt wasn't the right word. Fear? Sort of. Funny to say that she forgot it, yet in her slapstick moment a second voice in her head came bursting through the control room, walloping her frustration upside the head. Her sense of reason was back in control and her mouth immediately closed like a vacuum. She didn't hide her wide-eyed expression, only growing more nervous by the sheer disbelief coming back through Katherine and James' heightened brows.

“I-I stopped myself!” Dawn declared, like it did her much good. “I'm sorry for saying that! There!” Sure, she didn't finish saying “you,” but something told her that it wasn't the second unfinished word that made them quite as upset...

She knew the looks. She knew the postures, the atmosphere. Christ, she could practically see herself getting spanked right now. And in processing all that in just the span of half a second, the silence that prolonged the inevitable punishment unnerved her relatively small body to no end.

“Dawn,” James was the first to speak, and Dawn's ears wished he hadn't. “I want you over here. Right now.” More than from just his size, there was a contextual weight that made it even harder to stand upright. The weight of disappointment and anger. She'd seen it all before. She had been through it all. Locked in cribs, corners, sterilized mouths, and bottom-blistering spankings. And now...now she was being *told* to step right into the bear trap? All on her own? Katherine slowly

squatted, sinking to her level, and eventually so did James. Just to make it easier to snatch her, naturally.

A choice.

A choice.

Choose to be punished. Choose to take a beating for being unable to follow impossible rules and stick to stupid, inhumane standards.

“N...nn...” Her voice wasn’t nearly as steady as more, and her tone crumbled like the earthquake making her tremble right then and there. “N-no! No! Nononono!”

Giants, standing in double digits of feet, were looming over her. Shadows from the shelves filled with toys of demise and cruel reminders of servitude stared back at her with child packaging, indoctrinating images, sad slogans and demoralizing designs. The aisle was half in size and so was the air in her lungs.

What would happen now? Something worse than a spanking? A chip? Is that what they used on that one kid? *No*, that *adult*...! N...no more walking...? D-didn’t she see an adult w-without...without any teeth? At the end of that day, that’s all they were. Amazons. Katherine and James were just names. Everyone had names, even the sickest most twisted titans Dawn could only conceive in her mind. Or maybe not. Maybe the worst was right in front of her.

“Daw—”

“*NO! NO!*” she screamed with a violent shake in her head, then finally she turned and she ran.

She huffed and she puffed. She hardly had the advantage. So little of one, in fact. Yet she had been the only one standing, so she had that for herself. And another thing; clothes. Not just a toy store, apparently. She whipped through the displays and shelves, leaving bundles of hanging bright reds, blues, yellows, purples, greens and more in her wake. Whether it made a difference or not she whimpered with each flail from her arms, trying to muddy the path behind herself by swiping whatever bottom-shelf things she could just to slow down her assured pursuers.

Was she hearing her own name? Probably. Did that stop her from running? Absolutely not. It felt crowded, stuffy, like no place was good enough to stop and breathe. It was a race against time. A race against her own body just to stop whatever was about to happen. She had to save herself. She had to save her identity. She was slipping. Falling. But who did she have? Who was supposed to save her....? Why was she even running again? What did she even do? Or say?

Had logic been behind the wheel she would've done otherwise, but primal fears and a haywire panic were what kept her legs pumping past the diaper over her hips that kept on shifting over and over.

An incoherent, whimpering yelp left her mouth once she tripped over nothing but mucky madness, and she was practically screaming as she scrambled as fast as she could to her feet, all so she didn't lose this golden opportunity. Running was how she saved herself, yet it was also what made the consequences from being caught so much worse. A high risk, high reward, supposedly. But she was back on her feet and all her ears were hearing was just a garbled mess.

But she screamed in panic. Every giant was danger personified, but...but what else could she do...?! It was either return to assured punishment, possibly mutilation, or embrace the unknown. If only she was sane enough to consider how just as equally bad, possibly worse, that could be.

“H-HELP! HELP ME! PLEASE! HELP!” Dawn screamed and screamed. Some had to be there, right? Someone listening? M-maybe...maybe a free Little? Someone who could flip open a magic trap door and let her leave this place. Someone who could swoop her up and save her from such a sordid situation.

She took rapid turns, winding and weaving until she was breathing faster and faster. Maybe she passed other Amazons, maybe she didn't. Did the shopping carts have people to go with them? Who knows. Her voice had gone hoarse and raspy, losing moisture as she stretched her cords into a raspy, tired state. Her face was hot and eyes were wet, but she kept on moving as fast as she could.

Until finally—

WHAM!

The collision was hard, bouncing right back into the body of the terrified Little and sending her down on her backside. What she'd hit was tall and solid.

“Oh...!” A woman above her spoke, and even in her brief daze, Dawn's adrenaline was enough to get her right back on her feet. Yet immediately she staggered. Her calves were exhausted and every muscle in her body was shot.

“Hhh...help...!” Dawn suddenly pleaded. It was her last chance. Her last opportunity. “H-help me...!” she whimpered. “Please!” Her body lurched forward and she hugged the jean-covered leg in front of her like it was the last tree in the Amazon.

“I-is everything okay?” the voice asked again. *Concern.* That’s what it sounded like.

“Nnn...I...! *Th-the...! S-some...one...!*” Dawn sniffled and breathed as much as she could.

“Hh...hurt...! Th-hey’re trying to...!”

“Dawn!” A distant voice called, and her arms tightened even more around the Amazon’s leg. She had yet to even look up at their face. All the same she clung to them for dear life.

“Dawn?” The woman’s voice repeated. “Is that your name? Is someone trying to hurt you?”

“Y-y...!” she didn’t quite finish the words, but her panicked nod rubbed her cheek up down and all over the woman’s denim.

But in a flash she was pried from her leg and lifted into the air.

“P-please...help...!” Dawn begged with her eyes sealed shut, and all she got back were shushes.

“Shh...don’t worry...stay calm...” And Dawn could feel the world bouncing up and down all over again. “I’m just checking one thing...” and after a few seconds, some loud, digital beep rang against Dawn’s ear. “Okay...” the woman sufficed again. “You’re in danger, right? Is there a bad guy looking for you?”

“Y-yes...!” Bad enough. With the kind of cannon James kept in his palm, the man certainly was a danger for packing illegal weapons like that.

“Well, can you do this for me? Hug me nice and tight,” the stranger instructed again. “I promise I’ll keep you safe.”

So without any other kind of option, Dawn did exactly that. Whether it was dumb or not, just being offered a solution felt better than anything else. It was either this or go back to be fed to the wolves. So her arms stayed around the woman’s neck while an arm kept her bottom afloat. She kept her eyes closed like the rest of the world somehow didn’t exist.

“You sound so tired...!” the woman whispered again with concern. “Just keep on taking nice big breaths, okay? Everything’s okay...promise,” and at the end of her words, another secure arm was draped over Dawn’s back and wrapped over her shoulder. She really did feel rock solid. Like she was in a vice grip. Like she really wasn’t going anywhere. Where they were moving she wasn’t sure, but the continuous distant shouts for her name terrified her to no end. The looming threat of something coming made her wince and flinch even behind her closed eyes.

But a similar mechanical noise played and automatic doors certainly slid open. She could feel the fresh air on her skin and a gentle breeze. Out...outside? Was that where they were?

“A-a...arewe...” Dawn started to ask, but a gentle press on the back of her head kept her down.

“Shh...it’s okay...just a little more,” the woman softly encouraged.

And on their walk through the parking lot, on their way to a different car that Dawn did not come in, they’d gone too far to see the store’s front doors lock. Too far to hear the store intercom announcing a search, and too far to hear any call for Dawn’s name again.

“Are you tired?” the woman asked Dawn while she sat her in the backseat. “You sure do look like it,” she tucked her cheek while she fixed a strand of blonde hair. “That’s okay,” she went on before Dawn could even respond. “You’re safe now,” she repeated, and the certainty truly felt conveyed. “Mmm...ah!” she quickly pulled out, closed the side door, then rushed up to the front. Dawn in a daze watched her move up to the driver’s seat, hop in, turn on the ignition, then play with her console.

Then all of a sudden, the seat in front of Dawn came to life.

“Have you seen Kitty Classroom before?” the Amazon asked with a soft, yet earnest smile. Dawn looked at the screen installed in the seat. She watched some strange opening of a cat bouncing around from place to place. Whiteboards, giant rulers, bright red apples, piles of oversized crayons, cartoon caricatures of kids chasing it around, and more.

Dawn blinked and before she knew it the car was already moving.

“Just watch that for a little, okay?” the Amazon encouraged her again, briefly giving her eye contact before going back to watching herself back out of the lot.

The car smelled freshened, like it was given a mint bath. Nothing overly potent, but certainly enough of something for Dawn to notice how it’d been cleaned.

“Uh-uhm...th...thank—” Dawn leaned forward to offer her gratitude, but she stopped when the straps over her shoulders stopped her. She blinked and looked down at herself, seeing something similar to what James and Katherine had put her in. A car seat, no doubt. Butterflies and bees were all over the seat’s cyan mesh padding, styled to look like a lawn of green grass down where her bottom was. Then as an afterthought she turned her head to the side, seeing two more car seats, similar to hers, installed in the other two seats.

“Are you hungry? Thirsty?” the Amazon asked her. “I have some snacks, if you want?”

“N...no thank you...” Dawn answered as she looked around, but she wasn’t exactly in the best state to be calling many shots.

“Your breathing sounds a whole lot better,” the Amazon didn’t turn around, but Dawn could hear her smile.

While the car seat didn’t allow for much, Dawn did manage to see a few different things thrown about beneath her. She could see some sort of stuffed caterpillar; made up of many different multicolored balls. A stuffed bear? Some giant six-sided cube. It looked plastic and like there were buttons, as if there was more to it than just holding and spinning.

She blinked and she blinked, glancing at the window, watching buildings somehow slide behind them, then at the mini-TV, seeing a cat in glasses crudely create dinosaurs, birds, chickens and more on its whiteboard. The illustrations would sparkle and shake, until finally they’d leap out from the board for the whole classroom of kids to see. But then there’d be the blonde Amazon up in the driver’s seat. A woman’s name that Dawn yet still didn’t know. But alas, she *did* save her from James and Katherine...

Save...

“Uhm, excuse me?” Dawn finally called out.

“Uh-huh? Dawn, right? Is everything okay?”

“Y...sort of...I mean, th-thank you. You really helped me out back there... I think I’m okay now though. Do you think you could just pull over, please?” Frankly her most immediate obstacle had just been solved. Getting away from Katherine and James. There was certainly risk to going out on her own, but one wall knocked over meant having the chance to overcome the next.

“Pull over?” The confusion is as potent as the mint smell. “Mmm, don’t worry, hon. Just try and rest a little, okay? The drive back is still a few more minutes.”

“Wait, where are we going?” Dawn leaned forward, then stopped just two inches or so later.

“Back to my house, hon,” her answer was as straightforward as it sounded. “Look, don’t worry, okay? You’re in safe hands. That bad man can’t reach you anymore.”

Her mouth opened but her face wore a difficult expression, playing with the syllables and sounds that she couldn't seem to form. "H-he...he's not bad, just...no, he is...everyone is..."

"Don't worry, we'll have time to talk back at home. Why don't you just rest for now, okay? You are ab-so-lute-ly safe, understood?"

Dawn didn't answer back, instead, quietly, lightly pressing into the button on her car seat harness. It was as if there wasn't even a button to begin with. Just a depression painted a different color from the rest of the thick plastic.

So they drove.

And drove.

Until the houses stopped. Less buildings. Suddenly a ramp, and...a highway.

A long stretch.

A drive worth more than just a few minutes.

And Dawn was tired. She did daze in and out of it. They didn't have much conversation, in part because of her savior's insistence on taking it easy. She did end up watching a fair bit of the show in front of her. How couldn't she? When you're strapped to a seat with only three directions to look in, two of which are windows slightly too high for you, it doesn't leave many options.

It seemed like a basic learning show, at best. Something kids got up to after a short day at preschool. Bright colors, lots of motion to keep her attention, and so on. Basic point after another. Apparently birds were like Amazons in that they only needed to sleep once. Prehistoric creatures were a thing of this world's past too, but she started to become a skeptic when they used some other weird plot device. Tiny robots? Nanites, were they? Microscopic things that were apparently a do-anything type of problem solver. Seeing as it had transitioned to fiction, she started tuning it out at that point.

"Oh! You're up!"

Dawn lurched forward from her seat, and thankfully this time there were no straps to hold her back. But the tall woman did press on her shoulders just to keep her from flinging forward.

“And you’re a little leapfrog!” she chuckled, and Dawn was too much of everything to react in any real way.

Her legs did squirm, however, feeling a fullness that’d been growing on her for some time now. Wonderful, courtesy of the juice she had been sipping on. Only...

The only reason Dawn could finally see the woman’s face was because of the interior car light. The sky was an orange hue, indicating that some time had certainly gone by. A good amount of time...

A few minutes...?

“Can...is there a bathroom I could use?” Dawn asked while she rubbed her eyes. A pair of hands took advantage of her exposed pits and lifted her up and out of the seat.

“There certainly is,” the Amazon chuckled, and once Dawn was against her hip, a sudden chill reached her thigh when a jerk came from her pants.

She looked down at her exposed leg, diaper included. Well above where the Amazon had tugged her pants down.

“W-wait! Hey!” Dawn complained, then cringed at the plentiful squeeze she gave the front of her dry diaper.

“But it doesn’t feel like you’ve used it yet,” the woman informed, like Dawn couldn’t have determined that herself. Then she, Dawn, and the Amazon’s chest bounced when she adjusted the other bag over her shoulder. “Okay, let’s go inside and say hi!”

“W-wait, but I...can’t you just take this diaper off me?”

They stopped again in the driveway. The Amazon yet again failed to understand.

“Sweetheart, your diaper’s dry,” she said a bit more directly. “We’ll change you once you need one, okay?”

And Dawn fought back the urge to say something indignant. Was the concept of Littles needing diapers really that universal? No matter what? Were there no exceptions? No sufficient explanations?

A set of double doors took the girl by surprise once they climbed the porch steps. She didn't even get to see the entire home in its size, too busy trying to hike back up her pants which were currently pinned against the Amazon's side, still only just above Dawn's knees.

A key in the woman's hand went in the lock, twisted, then she pulled it out. But before opening the door...

Another lock clicked open. This time, Dawn was arching her neck just looking at the woman feeding a key into a lock higher than even herself at the peak of the door.

"What do you need two locks like that for...?" Dawn frowned with confusion.

"It's to keep all you munchkins safe!" the Amazon chuckled, and before Dawn could ask any more, the doors were opened.

"We're home!" the giant announced to an empty room. The main entrance didn't exactly welcome Dawn the same way as a standard home. More of a communal living space...

A few bulbous lights hung from a second-floor ceiling over the wide space. Potted plants decorated the corners with a few waiting couches to sit on. An empty secretarial desk was on the side, waiting in front of a wall-mounted board filled with all sorts of pinned papers. There were three different ways to go, all of which had swing gates to them.

"Where are we...?" Dawn asked again, spotting a discarded giant inflated ball right next to a well-played-with doll.

"A place I think you're gonna like a lot!" the blonde chuckled, then carried them onward. Bad memories of the Little-trician's office played through her head when Dawn watched her carrier reach over the gate and flick a chain latch in yet another high spot. It was re-done once they walked through, and the restrictions didn't stop there. Instead of gates, however, now it was mesh ones short enough for the Amazon to vault her leg over, though certainly too tall for Dawn to climb...

And then a very unfortunate smell hit Dawn's nose.

It was overly potent, like the mint, but objectively bad. She could feel the warmth of a coming kitchen, but a blended smell of things that did not belong. Chemicals and food? Minerals and mush? Chocolate and peanut butter? Poor example, but the smell made the Little's stomach uncomfortable.

“If it’s that wonderful smell, then it must be...! Gina’s cooking tonight!” the woman announced.

The kitchen space was tall and large. Two islands with a gap between and a long series of counters and cabinets spanning around. A large metal pot was slowly boiling over a stove, of which had another woman standing beside it.

She wore a disinterested look with her eyes on her phone and another hand idly swirling the pots contents with a long wooden spoon. Finally she looked up.

“Veronica? What’re you doing back on your...wait– who’s that?” Gina locked eyes with Dawn, who only after blinking reached harder for her pants that she couldn’t raise.

“Little sweetie that I found~!” Veronica, the newly-named blonde Amazon teased with her rocking hips, holding Dawn tighter against herself. “That I saved, actually!”

“Saved?” Gina repeated, though her expression was a bit mixed.

“Yes, saved! You should’ve seen it! Some grown man was chasing after her in the store I was at! She was screaming for help!”

“Th-that’s not how...” Dawn tried to correct, even if she technically wasn’t wrong, but Gina spoke over her just to address her friend.

“And the exact reason *why* you didn’t just kidnap a Dad’s Little is...?”

Kidnap? Dawn frowned. Is that how she saw it? If nothing else, Dawn was willing to vouch for a person if it meant working towards freedom. She opened her mouth, but apparently it wasn’t her turn to speak.

“I checked!” Veronica insisted. “I used that app on our phones!”

Gina simply held out her hand like trying to fight off the verbal assault. “Sounds good then. You’re gonna have to talk to Urna, though. Kinda sounds like a stretch to me.”

“Just wait and see!” Veronica eagerly nodded. Dawn was wondering what app they were talking about. “Is she up in her office?”

“Yeah, think so. Dinner’s in ten minutes by the way, so maybe convince her to at least let that Little eat with everyone else regardless.”

“Yah-huh!” Veronica replied with her back to her friend, and Dawn being none the wiser. Less the wiser, in fact.

“That’s my friend and coworker, Gina,” Veronica cheerily explained. “You’ll like her a lot. She doesn’t show it so much, but she likes looking after you guys!”

“Looking after...?” Dawn shook her head. “Wait– no, Veronica, right? I think there’s some misunderstanding here. You saved me, yeah, but I don’t need a place to stay. I’m fine, really. So you can just let me go now, you know?”

“In the middle of the night?” Veronica smirked like it was a bad, outlandish joke. “Don’t worry, hon, we’ve got a crib for you, I’m sure.”

“A-a crib?”

Veronica didn’t comment back. Instead, they climbed the stairs past a room that seemed to have a fair bit of noise going on in it. Veronica sauntered them down the long hall of many doors until turning the corner and knocking on one with a particular plaque.

URNA HATES - H.o.O.

Dawn read the words with worried skepticism, flinching from the sudden rapping knock on the door.

“Ms. Urna?” Veronica called out. “It’s me, Veronica! Do you have a second to talk?”

“Veronica?” A feminine, but deeper voice answered back. The words were like rousing from an engrossed session of paperwork, emphasized by the moment of silence and muffled noise of organizing papers. “You may come in.”

“Hi again!” Veronica chuckled on her way in. Dawn marveled a bit at the decorated space. An entire wall was dedicated to shelves of books, and another with drawers and drawers of something. A window overlooked the outside right behind the silhouette of a large chair, of which a large woman was sat in it. Her lips were pursed with fingers folded through each other, resting in front of a thick binder of pages and papers.

Her look wasn’t exactly pleasant, but it wasn’t distressing, either. Simply neutral, like she was putting on a mask.

“Oh?” Urna’s eyes locked onto Dawn. “I wondered why you were back on your day off?”

“Right?” Veronica chuckled, but Dawn had yet to find a single person willing to reciprocate her giggles and laughs. “This is Dawn! She was being chased by someone in the store—” then held a hand up between her mouth and the Little in her arms. “Someone bad,” she said in a lower voice, but Dawn would’ve had to cover her own ears not to hear it. “Then she found me and asked for help, so I took her back here! And I promise— I scanned her! She’s not adopted!”

“W-well, of course I’m not adopted?” Dawn frowned up at the woman.

“And she’s already wearing diapers on her own?” Urna asked, though with a bit of skepticism.

“Oh, I found her like this,” Veronica pinched and tugged the waistband of Dawn’s diaper, causing her to immediately try and pull her pants back up again.

Urna shared a look with the woman, then slightly leaned forward, putting on a thin smile for Dawn. She asked one octave higher, “Do you have a name, honey?”

“It’s Dawn...” the Little answered, albeit not liking the atmosphere. “Listen, uhm, I’m not quite sure what this is, but—”

“She doesn’t even know where she is?” Urna interrupted in her normal voice just to question Veronica.

“I said I’d explain to her when we got here,” Veronica said.

“Yet you’ve been here for how long?” Urna raised her brow, Veronica had no answer, but no chastising came. “Dawn?” she called, like she needed to get the Little’s attention from elsewhere, “Dawn, right now you’re at Happily Ever After. This is an orphanage for lost Littles like you.”

Like me?

Every single alarm bell went off in the girl’s head.

“W-wait,” immediately Dawn tried to wiggle out of Veronica’s hold, but she hardly budged. “N-no...no, that’s not right. A-an orphanage? You said we were going to your home!” she cried up at Veronica.

“This *is* my home, though?” she tilted her head. “I sleep here just like you little guys do! Urna, please? She was in danger! Oliver just got adopted last week, right? She can use that crib, can’t she?”

“Wait! Wait!” Dawn insisted again as she tried to get the spotlight back. “Wh-what are you talking about?! I’m not staying at an orphanage! I’m not an orphan! I’m just trying to get home! You helped me get away from those Amazons, yeah, but now I need to get home to my family that’s still well and alive!” Lest she try and explain the concept of living independently on her own.

“And where is home, Dawn?” Urna patiently asked. The following silence; an opportunity to answer, frankly surprised the girl.

“I-it’s...” Would they even believe her? Should she even be saying it? “It’s another dimension! It’s Earth! I-I came from there and visited here for like a week! It was just a tourist vacation! B-but when I was supposed to leave, my tour guide took all my stuff and left me here! I-I don’t have my visa, my passport, but...but I just want to go home...!”

“Oh, honey...” Urna cooed, and noises echoed off the floor as a warm body suddenly embraced the girl. “From Earth? Another dimension? You’ve come such a long way!”

“P-please...please don’t hug me...!” Dawn tried to refuse and wipe her eyes, but the woman’s hug was unyielding.

“I’m sorry to say, but I like giving hugs an awful lot, so for the time being, you’ll have to let me be a bit selfish while you’re here.”

“W-wait, no...I’m fine. You can just let me leave...! I need to go home!”

“I know, I know,” Urna tried to softly shush her, then adjusted her own shirt. “So what’s this other dimension like?”

A small, sour look wore on the Little’s face.

“Hm? What’s wrong?” Urna asked.

“Did she mess herself?” Veronica volunteered a solution, and before Dawn could refuse, a lone finger stretched the back of her waistband.

“Nope, all good,” Urna narrated, then asked again. “Dawn? What’s bothering you, hon? You can tell me.”

“Do you even believe me?” Dawn bitterly asked.

“Do I believe you?” Urna repeated. “Of course I do. Why wouldn’t I?”

Why wouldn’t she? “B-because...” and as much as it sucked to admit, “Because I have no proof? Because there’s nothing about me that’s foreign...?! I-I...I look like everyone else! I talk and act the same— there’s nothing to convince anyone other than what I say!”

“Do you wanna suck on this?” Urna offered a pacifier, and Dawn was about to scream bullshit before realizing that it was the same one tethered to her own shirt. The one Katherine put on her...

Katherine...

“N-no...” Dawn pushed it back far enough for Urna to let it drop and dangle.

“Well Dawn, since it sounds like you’re so new here, Littles like you from other places aren’t very common, but they aren’t unheard of! But Portal Littles that get lost like this...? Hmm...I think that’s even more rare.”

“Yeah,” Dawn agreed much more sadly. “So what you’re saying is that I’m stuck here.”

“I never said that,” Urna answered without hesitation, and Dawn blinked with a pause.

“Wh-...what...what do you mean?” Dawn nervously asked.

“You want to go home, right?” Urna had a small smile. “I don’t see why I can’t help with that?”

She blinked again, like somehow that would make her ears work properly. But she was wary and afraid. Nervous of some kind of trick.

“H-help with what...?”

“Going home?” Urna leaned her head in a little bit closer. “I’m offering to help take you home, sweetheart.”

“R-really...?” her voice cracked before the words could finish, and it only seemed to make the woman seem more tender.

“Yes, really,” Urna showed some teeth as her lips curled.

“H-how...how long? How long would it take?” Dawn nervously asked. She hated it. She hated asking, poking and prodding like the offer was somehow real. She didn’t want it. She didn’t want a chance. She didn’t want hope. James promised her the same thing and he kept kicking the can. Who knows if his stupid plans ever would have worked. If they even existed. LPS was just a convenient means to stall for a different excuse for later. What would this woman use instead? Or would she just skip straight to the truth bomb?

“Mm...well, giving a specific time is a little hard. You are a little bit of a rare case,” Urna chuckled, and that reality made Dawn woefully sore all over again. “But far from impossible,” she added with a chuckle.

“C-can you prove it?” Dawn blurted aloud, almost covering her mouth after she said it. Regret was the first thing she felt. Like questioning reality would somehow undo it and change it into something far more twisted.

“Prove what?” Urna asked. “Taking you home? It’s okay, don’t be afraid,” she bounced Dawn briefly. “You can ask.”

It was okay...? She was encouraging her? Encouraging, unlike James and Katherine, the people that tried to dissuade her from asking. Made up excuses for why there wasn’t anything to share. Meanwhile, for the first time, an Amazon was actually willing to share.

“I-I...the...the last people who said the same thing...they just told me how it was. They never actually showed me anything... There was no proof they actually tried to take me back home... All they said was why it was hard to do it.”

“Mmm...” Urna sagely nodded. “I see. Sometimes it can be a little hard to believe something unless you see it, right?”

And surprisingly, slowly, Dawn agreed with a hesitant nod.

With Dawn against her hip, they moved back behind the desk where Urna sat them down, leaving Dawn to straddle her leg.

“If it’s okay I’m just gonna take these off so you can sit a bit better...” Urna explained as Dawn felt her pants go lower and lower until they were snaked off her shoes. She didn’t like the half-naked feeling, but it did allow her legs to go down. Not to mention, as strangely welcome as the Amazon was being, she didn’t want to accidentally say or bring up the wrong thing. After all, an exposed diaper was a small price to pay if she was being promised genuine freedom.

“Do you have computers where you’re from?” Urna asked with an arm hovering around Dawn’s stomach.

“Yes...” Dawn said.

Urna tapped her keyboard and the large screen came to life.

Dense, convoluted-looking spreadsheets littered the screen, including webpage articles, emails, journals, and more.

“Sorry...” Urna chuckled as she clicked away and minimized things. “My computer can look as messy as my desk at times. Ah. Right here, see?”

A white window came up with a list of many, many rows. But she recognized email handles, subject titles, dates, and contents...

“I do a lot of work through emails with people in all sorts of places. Have you been here long enough to hear about a group called LPS?”

The girl shuddered. Both for what it was and how excessively James and Katherine abused it’s name.

“Yes...I know,” Dawn tried not to sigh.

“They have to do a lot with how to handle Littles, and that includes getting them home. I talk with LPS a lot, actually. See this email here? Veronica just mentioned it, but this was the Little we had here that was just adopted. I sent his papers on file with us to LPS for record keeping. I talk with their caseworkers a lot.”

So she was a person with connections to high places... Federal places...? An uncomfortable glow sprouted in Dawn’s stomach. “B-but you said that was because he was adopted? Y-you’re not doing that to me, right? I’m going home?”

“Yes, I promise, you’re going home,” Urna insisted, then even gave her a brief rub on the shoulder.

“B-but...” *Why? Why are you asking questions, you fucking idiot?! She’s offering your a golden-fucking goose!*

“You know,” Urna chuckled, “I find that I can help make people feel much more comfortable when they’ve gotten everything out of their system.”

And unfortunately that poor choice of words made Dawn squirm again.

“Is something else wrong, too?” Urna chuckled, and Dawn merely blushed. Without many options, she resorted to the first issue.

“Y-you’re just letting me stay here? For free?” She seemed nice enough, albeit behind a practice Dawn in no way supported, but wasn’t a business a business?

Urna laughed for a minute, and so did Veronica, suddenly making the Little feel like a fool for asking something apparently she should’ve known the answer to.

“Honey, we just only went down by one, so trust me when I say that this place is built big enough for you. In all my years of running this place, I don’t think we’ve ever had to scale down, so frankly, you being here helps keep our supplies for everything much more regular!”

“Maybe we should start paying Dawn while she’s here, huh?” Veronica chuckled at her boss.

“Maybe,” Urna playfully agreed, though the cheery attitude wasn’t reflected.

And the seemingly positive flow had her feeling brave enough to ask another thing.

“A-and uhm...an...another thing...”

“You can have as many ‘another things’ as you’d like,” Urna chuckled. “What is it?”

“Can...can I please use a bathroom? A *toilet*,” she emphasized with extreme specificity.

And then it finally hit. Pushback.

A calm, yet uneasy hum came from Urna. One that made Dawn wince.

“That one might be a bit more tricky...” Urna explained.

“I-I can use the toilet! I’m potty trained! I promise!” Dawn suddenly pleaded. She tried to fidget just to face the woman, but the Amazon hands on her shoulders kept her from turning.

“Easy there,” Urna cooed, “that’s a good way to fall off and bump your head, honey. Now, about what you asked. Whether you’re potty trained or not, I hope you understand that there is a difference in size between us Amazons and you Littles, right?”

“R-right...” Dawn agreed, but her disappointment was already wet and heavy, much like the soon-to-be state of her diaper given the course of things.

“I won’t lie to you: all our Littles here are in diapers,” Urna explained, and even now the few simple, finalizing words were enough to perturb the girl. But she was honest...and conflictingly, in Dawn’s head, that did count for something. “I’ve had plenty of Littles tell me they can use the potty, and I really do believe some of them,” but it doesn’t change that we don’t really carry that kind of equipment here to accommodate those needs. We have lots of nice people here like Veronica,” who cheerily waved from the other side, “that live and work here specifically to take care of all of you! So in that regard, you’d be taking away one of their jobs that they live here to do. Take care of you.”

Change your diapers.

“B-but I...even if it’s a stool– you have to have that here, right?” Dawn tried to reason, but her fire for freedom was trying to ignite under a raincloud.

“There’s very few things that a legal institution is allowed to use that gives Littles access to Amazon-sized toilets, Dawn, and unfortunately we don’t have those. I promise you that it’s no trouble, and again, being part of the routine just works a lot better for us here. That means you’ll be taken care of just like all the other Littles here, okay?”

Taken care of. The same. Just like all the other Littles. All the others in diapers. Littles that are waiting to be adopted. And Dawn just gets to stay for the interim until...going home.

“I-I’m sorry...” Dawn spoke again, starting to dig her knees in Urna’s leg just to keep herself composed. “B-but...how do I know you’re telling the truth?”

Quietly, Urna nodded with a small breath. “Trust can be a hard thing sometimes, can’t it? Really, Dawn, I think trust is something you’ll feel with me, Veronica, and everyone else here as time goes on, and you come to see just how badly we want to do right by you. Your name is Dawn, right? From Earth? I’ll need some other information from you, like your age and last name to build a file, but I plan on asking about you to my contact at LPS. They’ll tell me what they know, and then from there I work with them on figuring out the process to get you home. We can take care of that tomorrow. You’ve given me a fun little challenge though,” Urna chuckled, “Portal Littles are a bit new to me!”

Again, more humor for Veronica as well, and just to feel a little less left out, Dawn weakly smiled too.

“So does that sound good to you?” Urna asked. “Here you’ll have a place to stay, be fed three meals, bathed, clothed, changed, and fit out in any other way you could imagine.”

“I-I don’t mind doing that stuff myself though,” Dawn politely interjected. “I…” it was a tough thing to cave in on, but given what was at the end of the tunnel… “I understand the diapers… Okay, fine. But stuff like cooking, and bathing, and stuff– I can take care of that myself, really.”

“And I really mean it when I say we want to take care of that stuff for you,” Urna politely pushed back, but far more firm. She adjusted part of her bangs. “And we do have rules for staying here, but it’s nothing serious– just simple stuff that makes it smooth for everyone. But I also have a special request for you, Dawn.”

“Y-yeah…?” She tried not to sound nervous. Suspense at any turn nowadays was downright terrifying. Amazons could be all smiles before becoming a mindless Mommy a second later.

“The reason for why you’re here, let’s keep that a secret between you, me, and Veronica, okay?”

Dawn felt the need to ask, but lo and behold, Urna explained.

“I won’t go into details, because it’s not what we’re about here, but the Littles that we take here are all in their own way from special circumstances. We don’t just take any Little boy or girl off the streets. We’re here to offer them something better; something they didn’t get that they’re sorely in need of. And what that end looks like is different for everyone.”

Me included, now that Dawn thought about it. She’d essentially be teasing every other destined-for-diapers Little that she was the only one who got to be free. She was guilty. It made her feel horrible.

But it didn’t change how badly she wanted to go home. She had sympathy, but not enough to forsake her own ticket back.

“So just so we don’t make anyone confused or upset, let’s pretend like you’re here for the same reason as everyone else, okay?” Urna asked, and Dawn finally nodded.

“Perfect,” Urna smiled. “I’m really glad Veronica brought you, Dawn. You seem like a very sweet girl with a lot on her plate. I’m going to be very happy taking some of that load off for you!”

It was a warm response with no real way for Dawn to respond without feeling weird. So she awkwardly shrugged, like a toddler shaking out their excess and unorganized emotions.

“Th-thanks...” Dawn replied.

“And Veronica?” Urna leaned out for her employee.

“Yes, Ms. Urna?” Veronica readily responded.

“As happy as I am to have Dawn, that doesn’t mean we were ready for another sudden arrival. Since you brought us such a lovely gift on your day off, I think it’s only fair you finish getting her settled in?”

“Of course! Will do!” Veronica reached out her arms.

Dawn meant to slide off Urna’s leg, but instead the orphanage head lifted her straight over and across her desk, right into Veronica’s hands.

“W-wait, my pants,” Dawn turned her head for them, which Urna was already folding in her lap.

“Oh, these?” Urna held them up. “Don’t worry, these can go in the laundry with all the other clothes,” she smiled. “Have a nice first night here, Dawn! I promise I’ll have more to tell you tomorrow, but until then, Veronica and all the other nannies will help you with anything you might need. For all intents and purposes, you’re just like any other Little staying with us.”

“M..mmm... Th...thank you...” Dawn nodded again, “Really.”

It wasn’t her ideal place to stay, but it was a far better deal than she had up until now. It was tangible. Urna talked to her. There was any caution tape. No stepping around sensitive, important subjects. She had connections. Power. She promised a follow-up. She encouraged and answered questions...

And all Dawn had to do was stick it out. Fuck, she hated them, but she could deal with diapers for a little longer if it meant going home. Just lie, pretend and act like she belongs? Acting in the sense of doing nothing. Just be herself. Easy. Super fucking easy. So...so very much too good to

be true... And yet it was. Or at least, it felt that way. But Urna showed her hand, clear as day, and tomorrow the picture would be even clearer.

“And Veronica?” Urna called again. “Make sure Dawn gets dinner with everyone else?” she asked expectantly.

“That’s right where we were headed!” Veronica giggled, then they left the office, beginning their descent back downstairs to a kitchen that sounded much more lively.

“So am I eating dinner, too...?” Dawn asked, despite it already being said.

“Of course you are!” Veronica said without hesitation. “We wouldn’t make you cook for yourself!” And Dawn got another gentle squeeze. The caretaker giggled all over again. “Welcome to Happily Ever After, Dawn!”

Up ahead, Dawn could hear the voices, including the sight of multiple high chairs...

“Gina!” Veronica jovially called. “Hope you have another bowl ready!”

And of all times, a small question rang in Dawn’s head:

What are James and Katherine doing right now...?