

4 - Shopping

Dawn jerked forward with a start when she finally came to. Her breathing was fast and her head was constantly turning.

Where was she? What was she doing?

“Dawn?” A calm voice spoke near her and a large hand stroked her back. “You okay?”

She jumped a little as soon as she was touched, but almost immediately her body calmed down. That didn't mean she wasn't still on edge. Looking up, it was almost a relief to see a familiar face; as familiar as a person could be after meeting them in less than 24 hours. Or longer than that, considering the days here were supposedly longer...

“Y...yeah...” She took a well-needed breath, still looking around. They were in the car still. James was behind the wheel with his eyes on the road, though she could see he kept giving her brief glances.

“Did you have a nightmare?” As if she decided the answer herself, Katherine was already trying to soothe her with strokes.

“Uh...no, I didn't...” Gently, she removed Katherine's hand from her back, or at least tried to signal so. It wasn't a bad dream, but it wasn't a pleasant sleep either...

Black void wasn't exactly what Dawn considered a dream. In other words, she wasn't dreaming. It was the kind of sleep that's strikingly similar to her drug-induced blackout. She wasn't totally worried about that though; people had dreamless sleep all the time. The off-putting part however was her sudden jolt. She felt the urgency, the panic, the fear, but had none of the visuals to go with it. This was new for her, and she didn't like it.

The more time she had to see her surroundings and understand the immediate situation, she calmed down some. She'd never be able to reach absolute zero, however. Not while she was here; the land of Amazons.

“You sure? Nothing you wanna talk about?” Katherine didn't seem convinced, and Dawn's unease subsided just enough to be annoyed by the endless pestering Katherine might do just so the girl would let her in. There was nothing to let her 'in' on though. Nothing that Dawn knew of...

“Where are we going right now?” Dawn tried to change the subject as she wiped her eyes.

“Did you forget already?” Katherine chuckled. “You really must have been tired.”

“I usually don’t take naps during the day...”

“Really? Not even here?” Here as in Libertalia?

“Uh...no?” Was there that big of a difference? She did remember hearing about a time difference; the length per day, but it couldn’t be that significant? She didn’t remember that part being mentioned in the tour briefing.

“Well, I bet you sleep like a log when you finally do go down.” She laughed, already forgetting physical boundaries as she patted Dawn’s head.

“Well...yes,” she rubbed the phantom remains of Amazon off her hair. “We tend to do a lot of sight-seeing, I guess, so it’s a lot of moving around?”

“Hmm...” Katherine quietly kept to herself for a little longer, right up to their arrival in the parking lot.

“Alright, gang,” James put the car in park. “We’re here.”

It took a second for Dawn to realize that she still didn’t know where ‘here’ was, not until Katherine exiting the car with her shed a light on things.

It was a large two-story department store, brandishing a loud and colorful sign labeled ‘LITTLE HAUL’, each and every bold letter decorated in some bizarre pattern. Some were polka-dots, others were stripes, zig-zag, solid colors, animal prints, letters.

“What is this place?” Dawn asked with a reluctant curiosity.

“Little Haul? Your tour didn’t pass a place like this?”

“Uh...no.” She was starting to become concerned once she got a better look of the customers going in and out. Almost each and every Amazon person or pair was consistently accompanied by a Little. A Little that looked to be...well, down on their luck, to say the least. She’d normally think they were regular infants the way they were dressed; dresses, overalls, dungarees, onesies, or the most risqué; no pants at all. One pair even passed by them.

“Mommy, please don’t make me wear them!”

“I don’t understand, sweetheart? You said you wanted panties; Pamper Pretenders is exactly what you were talking about?” You couldn’t feign confusion like that. She seemed genuine; oblivious to the adult she was holding in her arms. And as they walked by, in case if Dawn needed more of a visual, the package of diapers the Amazon was referencing was stylized to look like women’s cut underwear.

It had the lavish looking prints, but that was all it was. Underneath the intentionally comic design was the paper, plastic and cotton that the Little would actually be wearing. Real panties didn’t have tapes to keep them on. How sick of a joke could that be? While she’d be given the illusion of adult underwear, in reality there’d be a sticky mess in her pants... Dawn grimaced. She didn’t like to think about being in her shoes...or diapers.

The apple didn’t fall far from the tree, though, as Dawn moved her legs and remembered the pull-up she was wearing. Unfortunately she’d gotten used to it or somehow managed to deal. She was in desperate need of panties. Real ones; not some diaper that only looked like one.

“Uhm...why are we here again?” Recent sights made her feel compelled to ask.

James took a more indirect approach. “So you are getting used to your current look, then?” Oh, right.

“We’re gonna find you some nice stuff to wear. That way you’ll feel a bit more comfortable?” The sliding glass doors just opened for them, and into the terrifyingly large department store they went.

It was massive.

To a Little, of course anything here would seem big, but even as an Amazon, Dawn could still imagine this place having some heft. Endless aisles with either modest retail shelves or warehouse-grade scaffolding to support some of the larger purchases.

Loud and colorful advertisements for any infantile resource imaginable. Clothes, food, furniture, games, books, shoes...and more. Her heart sank a little more once she remembered that it looked like there was a second floor to this place.

Amazons and shopping carts bustled all about. Dawn grew a bit squeamish whenever she could hear a scream, shriek or cry. Unfortunately it was something that came with the territory. Every square inch of this small fortress was geared towards the commercialized motive of taking Littles down a maturity notch or two. In other words, a living hell for someone like Dawn. Despite supposedly being in good hands, she felt like she'd just entered the lion's den.

“And...we're looking for clothes for me?” Katherine gave her a cheery ‘mhm’. “H-here...?” She didn't want to be picky, but Dawn had a sneaking suspicion that nothing here was going to tickle her fancy. Yet since it wasn't her money that was being spent, did she even get a say?

While Dawn nervously eyed their surroundings, Katherine looked as if she was on Cloud Nine. Then again...she did say that she was looking to adopt... Dawn took a breath. And thankfully it wasn't her...

With all the hormone-crazy Amazons running about in here, all with the common goal of adoption, Dawn was by no means looking to be set down. For once she was thankful for the security of another's arms. She felt supported in more ways in one. That said, she'd have preferred to avoid something as nerve-racking as this altogether.

“So...uhm, a normal clothing store wouldn't have had something for me?” Dawn asked as her eyes couldn't help but fix themselves on some of the more bizarre products. Flavored pacifiers was one. She grimaced once she realized they were sized for an adult mouth like hers. Another was muscle-relaxant cream... The advertised image on the bottle was an illustrated face of relief, as if they'd just unloaded a great deal of stress...physically, in-fact. Given the context of the store it was being sold in, Dawn didn't want to imagine why they looked so relieved...

“They probably would have...” Katherine was looking at all odds and ends like Dawn too, only with much more enthusiasm. James was going to keep her in check, right? “...But, they won't have nearly as much variety as here would! I'm sure there'll be something you like.”

Just when Dawn felt like she may have been getting on some wavelength with Katherine, all it took was a department store filled with babyish stuff to whisk her off to the fantasies of parenthood yet again.

“James? I don't suppose you wanna weigh in?” Dawn asked. In truth, she just needed someone 'grounded' to talk to. He looked a little lost for words, merely shrugging.

“Free shopping trip?”

Dawn sighed.

The clothing section of the store was like a mini shop within the grand scheme. Racks on racks of clothes were hung along the sides followed by aisles of more. Display mannequins were also put up, though what Dawn didn't expect were the diapers taped on them. Some were flashing them because of the outfits they were dressed in, and others had theirs concealed. Make no mistake, however, as that didn't give them any more modesty. No, because whatever went over them instead accentuated or complemented their diaper bulge.

Despite being for Dawn, Katherine didn't seem to be fishing for any input as she strolled about. Dawn did get a little scared though when she lingered around a display of onesies for too long.

"Does, um, your wife come here often?" Dawn asked James.

"She says she doesn't," James explained, looking to his entranced lover. "But...usually she runs late getting home on Fridays. Something tells me she likes to window shop..."

"So I was thinking maybe some jeans?" Dawn suggested, hoping to steer this woman away from the dresses. Katherine looked at her almost like an afterthought, as if she forgot why Dawn was there in the first place. "Oh! Right. Sorry, I get a little carried away when I come here..." Sheepishly, she laughed. Dawn didn't. "Pants, you said? Hmm..." she scanned their surroundings. "I think they have them somewhere..."

It was a long and slow stroll to their destination. Sometimes they'd sway to-and-fro, solely because Katherine saw something that caught her eye. While she seemed to be in Amazon Heaven, Dawn was stuck in Little Hell.

"Oh, James! Look! They make animal footie pajamas!" She was ecstatic as with a free hand she felt the soft and furry exterior.

The outfit was in fact a set of footie pajamas; right around Dawn's size in fact. The feet and leg cuffs were well defined, marked by elasticized endings using bunched material. Though, it took Dawn a second to realize what sort of animal she was looking at. The arms and legs were mostly black, followed by a white torso in the center. It wasn't until Katherine pulled the attached hood out from hiding could Dawn see the black ears as well.

"Is it supposed to be a panda?" Dawn leaned forward to feel the outfit too. Katherine, being the dotting person she was, moved forward just a little closer for her sake. It was a little surprising to Dawn once she did touch it. It was soft, really soft. "How much even is something like this?"

Wordlessly, Katherine looked at the attached tag which was out of Dawn's view, conveniently enough. "It's not much. Why?" She smiled, poorly hiding her excitement. "Did you want to try it on?"

"Uh...no..." Dawn said awkwardly. It was cute, but being cute was the last thing she wanted right now. Dignified seemed more her speed at the moment. The awkwardness in her response came from so harshly shutting Katherine down.

"Oh...alright then." They moved forward.

Dawn could see endless piles of patterned onesies, decorated socks, and unfortunately endless diaper covers. She'd been expecting it, but seeing it now made her quite uncomfortable. It reminded her of how close she'd come to being stuck in a world like that. By the same token, it even made her think fondly of Katherine and James. After all, they were the ones who saved her from it.

"Do they really not have any pants here?" Dawn was starting to become a bit restless. All there seemed to be were clothes that either showed off your diaper, accentuated it, or simply made you look cute enough for someone to expect you to be wearing one.

"Maybe they don't anymore...?" Katherine sounded as if she was off in another world. James had been lagging behind this entire time. Clothes didn't really seem to be his topic of discussion. In truth, Dawn may have preferred riding in his arms. At least that way she didn't need to have a front row seat for Katherine's gushing.

They reached the end of the aisle and were back at all the displays. Large signs hung from the ceiling at the entrance of each row, listing all the related items.

They watched their right for a little bit; Katherine likely reading the signs. Just as they turned to the left Dawn decided to catch something in her eye.

"Wait!"

Katherine looked at her.

"Over there! Back to the right! See? Pants!" She was a little more excited than she'd like to admit, but how could she not be? It felt as if their long, arduous journey had finally reached its end.

“Oh, you’re right. Good eye, Dawn!” With that she ruffled the girl’s hair. Dawn let it go this one time, since she was finally in a good mood.

But alas, a good mood was hard to maintain.

“Don’t they have something...less...colorful?”

Some looked like they were denim, but none had the simple, relaxed blues, blacks and greys she was so used to. No, instead she’d been treated to pinks, blues, greens, oranges; loud, blaring colors that were as noticeable as they were bright and neon.

“What’s wrong with these colors? Aren’t they cute?” Again, Katherine just didn’t seem to get it.

Dawn noticed another “feature” to them. One that was less than exciting.

“Do they not have zippers?”

She reached forward to the pale orange traffic cone pair. The large orange button sewn on the front flap was bordering cartoonish. She was trying to find the zipper to the front flap, like a normal pair of jeans would, but she was quick to realize that normal no longer applied once traditional color was thrown out the window.

There was no front flap. The button was simply for design. The “seam” you usually see in pants, right where the zipper would go, was nothing more than that. A seam. For all intents and purposes they were slip-on pants. Not that it was bad, objectively, but seeing as Little clothing, Dawn couldn’t help but consider it another childish factor intended by design. Why bother giving the Littles something as complicated as a zipper?

Just to confirm her suspicions, Dawn tugged at the waist, and sure enough it certainly did stretch more than a normal pair would. They might technically be jeans, but only technically...

“Think you wanna try them on?” Katherine still couldn’t hide a twinge of enthusiasm.

“Uh...” By now, Dawn was starting to feel bad. Left and right she’d been rejecting Katherine in every which way possible, and she was just about to do it again. “Are...are there any other pants that come off as a little more...mature?”

“Really?” Of course she was going to sound disappointed. Amazon or not, of course, Dawn felt guilty. “What’s wrong with them?”

“Well, because,” and on the flip-side, why was it so hard to see the issue? Dawn knew why it was, but the simple truth was so baffling that she couldn’t help but try to deny it. “The colors are way too bright and there is no actual button flap? You just pull them on?”

“Right? Isn’t that nice?” Katherine rubbed the pant leg, somehow forgetting that Dawn’s list of grievances were grievances.

Dawn sighed slightly. By now she’d have to make it a point that she was dissatisfied.

“I...I just want to find something that’s more like what I’m used to wearing.”

“Well...alright.”

They strolled down the aisle some more, though that didn’t mean they found anything more promising. In-fact, it only got worse. Probably more creative and exciting in Katherine’s eyes, but Dawn not so much.

“Oh! How about these? They have kitties on them!” Indeed they did. Pale pink pants covered in tiny cartoon cat heads, all patterned with one of four different expressions. But if that weren’t already a deal-breaker, Dawn found the piece de resistance.

“Are those buttons?” On the crotch were an array of white snaps. Looking at it now, Dawn wondered why it wasn’t the first thing she noticed. This pair of pants did have a flap on it, only it was one for the crotch... They were walking down an aisle, yet it was starting to feel like a terribly slippery slope.

“Okay, fine. Let’s go back to the other pants...” An unfortunate end, but seeing how bad things were getting, it couldn’t help but feel like a comparative victory. Regardless, it seemed like Katherine had made a content noise.

Really, they did somehow look better after seeing some of the other offenders.

“Is this really all they have for colors?” That was still issue numero uno. She’d prefer not to be a walking light-show.

“There might be some hanging in the back...” Katherine weaved her hand through the bunch, giving Dawn a few glimpses of what lay behind. Surprise, surprise, it was more of the same colors. Maybe a few new ones, but equally as bad. Maybe it was dark under the shelf and it was so far back, but Dawn could have sworn she saw a black pair-!

“Oh! How about these?”

Katherine pulled out a pair of pale-blue ones. Shockingly, the color was bearable. Not the most ideal, especially since she thought she saw the best pair, but she probably didn't... Katherine likely would've grabbed it otherwise.

They looked just like the orange ones. Only...not orange.

“Is this pair alright?”

Given the circumstances, any choice she'd have would be the lesser of two evils. Guess it was time to bite the bullet...

“Yeah, I guess it's fine.”

“Hehe, I like them too,” she snickered, then to Dawn's surprise set her down.

“W-what? Katherine?” Dawn wrapped the sweater a bit more tightly around herself, hopping a little from foot to foot. After being carried around so long she'd forgotten just how sensitive her feet could be to the cold, tiled floor. “Don't we need to go to a changing room?”

Katherine raised a brow with a strange smirk. “Changing room? But you're not...? Oh!” Apparently she'd made a silly blunder, not that it meant Dawn was any less in the dark however. “You shouldn't need a dressing room for something like this, right?”

Truthfully, she probably didn't, but she didn't like being denied a private space... That said, it's not like she was going to get any more naked than she was right now. It was going to be the exact opposite, in-fact. “I...guess.”

Katherine got on her knees and leaned in close with a whisper. “Are you afraid someone will see your undies?”

She didn't like to admit it, but by now the pull-ups really weren't a secret, though that didn't mean she'd stop trying to hide the truth. With a stammering blush, Dawn averted her eyes and

muttered a yes, though that didn't quite feel like it summed up how she was feeling. Need she forget what she was actually wearing, which were most certainly not 'undies'.

Katherine gave a sympathetic 'mhhh' as she looked around for a moment. Was she actually trying to help Dawn?

"James, hon? Could we borrow you for a second?"

The husband who had been pleasantly woolgathering about the area had looked as if he were broken from a trance at the sound of his name. He walked on over. "What's up?"

"While Dawn tries on some pants, do you think you could hold up my sweater behind her? Just so she has a curtain?" What? Now she was getting James involved? Was it really this involved?

"But, couldn't we just use a changing room?" Dawn was feeling less and less enthusiastic about this. Not that there really was any enthusiasm to begin with.

"We'll be real quick, okay? This way we can find your size. Then we can look at a few more designs." She was already guiding the sweater off of Dawn, who was starting to feel a tinge of anxiety. Too fast. This is moving too fast.

The sweater came off and all she had to her person was a bra, shirt and pull-up. Shakily, she looked to her behind which was a curtain of knitted sweater, held by the ever-so kind James. Thankfully he was mindful to some degree, as instead of looking down at the poor girl he was staring straight ahead.

"Alrighty, let's try this pair out." It came as another shock when Katherine was holding the pants by the waistband for her; nice and low to step her legs into. This...this wasn't the first time something like this had happened?

Dawn's heart was beating. Beating more than usual. Faster, heavier; a rapping thump against her chest. Why...why was she getting such an odd sense of deja vu? "Uh...uhm," she gulped, feeling a sudden cold sweat.

"Dawn? Honey?" Katherine smiled. "You gotta step in if we're gonna put them on, silly."

It felt like a total paradigm shift. The atmosphere felt thick and heavy, the surrounding noise became deafened muffles, and all Dawn could see was a giant from the neck down, holding open

the cage to a prison she'd willingly commit herself to. It was too familiar. Far too familiar. So familiar, that she knew better than to fall for it again.

"N-no..." Dawn muttered rockily. Never once did she actually look at Katherine's face. It was clear she was transfixed on the moment rather than the participants.

"Dawn? What's wrong?"

"No...no!" She was frozen, but then she wasn't. For once, she had the conviction to flee.

She bolted.

She was cold and borderline naked, but that did nothing to dampen her adrenaline. It was a quick turn and sprint around James' legs, and all she could hear behind her was the shout for her name. Was it out of concern? Anger? She didn't know, but it'd all become so...so claustrophobic.

Twice now she'd felt like this. She wasn't going crazy, was she? Of course she knew what it all felt like. It felt like that same, damn bathroom from this morning. All that mattered now was distance. She needed to calm down and she couldn't do it here.

She spun on her heel once she reached a main branch, quickly realizing the mob of Amazons, all moving about with massive carts. There was an even tighter grip on her heart and she was breathing fast.

Since day one of the tour, the idea of there being people about three times your size was quite intimidating, but there was solace in knowing they were just like you. Rational, like-minded, functioning adults. It was the fine line between lawful regulation and sadistic, twisted fantasy that made these people either pleasant, gentle giants, or a living nightmare.

So what if they weren't? What did it mean if those same giants weren't of rational minds? What if they were to use their overwhelming, dominating strength and project their desires on the powerless? Project them on you? Defenseless, innocent, you.

Once you brush shoulders with death, you don't forget the chilling sensation; realizing that decades of your life, thousands of experiences, achievements, highs and lows, dreams and aspirations all culminating into a rich, diverse and unique individual, can all somehow be meaningless in the face of total and crushing adversity.

Of course you can't help but feel some sort of...*significance*, because in your own perspective you are the main character of your own life. It's your story, so without you, what's left? That's why the story can't end. *You* can't end.

Realizing your own mortality is what shatters that illusion. The fantasy of immortality. The belief that somehow you possess such significance that you'll never succumb to a life-changing or potentially life-ending fate.

The business woman on the street, tutted along by a child leash, firmly in the hand of her oppressor. The countless Littles all sitting in shambles at the police station; on the verge of tears, already crying, or simply defeated. Even the Little who was being whisked out of the store by the Amazon with panty diapers... Each and every one of them had something before *this*. Before a life of diapers, bottle-sucking and who knows what else. A working, dignified life. One with more meaning than fulfilling the desires of someone else, who simply decides to override theirs on a whim. Not a one could Dawn remember their faces. They were all one muddled, homogeneous blur of misfortune and grief. The anonymity is what made them all the same. It didn't matter where they started from, because in the end the funnel always leads to the same place.

As her legs carried her as fast as they could, Dawn could see herself in the faint reflection on the glossy floor. Her hair swinging all around as she stumbled and tumbled, just managing to keep her balance in such a frantic state. But in that confusion, it was slowly starting to make sense. She understood the chills, the anxiety, the fear, the cold sweats and seemingly irrational panic. She could see it in the reflection. She could see it in her reflection, and it shook her very core.

It was a homogeneous blur.

Dawn wasn't running. She wasn't panicking. She wasn't trying to find her way out of this. She wasn't doing anything. She wasn't even anything. She wasn't significant. She wasn't one of one. She was one of many. One so, so, so, so, so many that held just as much bearing as she did. None. The absolute proof of that? The fate of those before her.

Mortality is realizing the outside world and its forces that exist beyond your own bias. They're the forces beyond your wishful thinking and rose-tinted glasses. They're the cold, rock-solid truths that shatter paradise. Mortality is understanding that you're just as fragile as everyone else. It's what transforms the thoughts of invincibility into inevitability; that you're powerless to the tide which can easily sweep you away. The tide that can come in oh so many forms. Mortality is perching the agents of fear and anguish atop your shoulders, caught in a nerve-racking state of limbo that simply wants the nightmares to end. Mortality is seen in many ways.

Mortality is realizing the truth.

Mortality is realizing that you're a Little.

A few rays of light shone through the darkness, cascading over the blubbering Little. They weren't rays of hope. They were the fluorescent lights of a department store meant for a force far more mighty and fearsome than she was feeling to challenge. The air was as still thick and heavy as it was moments earlier, and the world felt no less lonely.

All around her were varying sets of clothes, each embodying some hideous or horrendous design, all disgusting in their own way. Maybe they were cute to some, but they were far too symbolic to not be received as such monstrosities. Maybe it was the English major in her that made it all seem so poetic; the way so many inanimate creatures could surround her from every angle and make her feel so trapped...

What was the endgame? Where was the endgame? When was it? So many important questions. All of which the Little had no answer to. Ever since the first time her boat had been rocked, the storm never seemed to have quite settled down. Now she'd just been hit with the lingers of it and she felt as if she'd just gone overboard.

She didn't want to move. She didn't want to do anything. All she could do was sob, knowing there was nothing beyond the circular rack of clothes other than further misfortune she'd never be able to wade herself through. The faint noise of music over the speakers seemed to keep her unease in check, had she managed to forget where she was.

"...Now come on, the least you could do is help me search?" There was a sharp noise from her breath as her muscles tightened and she clutched her legs closer. She had to forcefully cover her mouth just so she couldn't be heard.

"I know, I know, I'll help! But...you are a lot better at this than I am." A male voice sighed. A voice the Little didn't recognize, but a voice that sounded high off the ground. High enough to know they meant absolute despair.

"Right." The other male one didn't seem too crazy about the other's response. "Well, we need to get something for Rei's Little. It's going to be their first adoption year, after all."

“It really has been that long...”

“Yes, it has. So, more importantly, should we be bothering with clothes or play it safe and get a toy?”

“Probably a toy would be the safest bet...”

“...I think so too. Alright, I think they’re over there...” And so the voices drifted off.

There was an unusual relief that washed over the Little. Once her muscles relaxed, there was a new wave of tears, simply realizing how the presence of strangers can put the fear of God into her.

She wanted to go home.

But if today had been proof of anything, it was proof of her inability to accomplish anything, much less her own freedom. All it took was one small peg to send down the row of dominoes.

James and Katherine.

Suddenly she remembered. She remembered the pair of Amazons who had been watching over her. Who had been helping her out. She ran from them. She was hiding from them. None of it was intentional, but it all seemed to look that way just because. They were probably wondering where she went off to. They were probably worried. But, maybe that small dose of panic could give them a smidgen of an idea of what it’s like to live in a Little’s world. To be lost and constantly on the run; always looking over your shoulder and never knowing whether you’re truly safe or not. Maybe they didn’t deserve all those negative feelings, but the poor Little would be lying if she said it didn’t feel good just to let others feel what she was going through. Just to understand something that set her apart from the dreary gray so many others were a part of.

But it didn’t. Despair wasn’t faithful to just her. It was a mistress estranged with countless others.

And then it only got worse. As society turned its back on her, so was her body starting to do the same.

It was that terrible twinge; that irksome pressure. It couldn’t have been more fitting for a damsel in distress, as Dawn was finally starting to feel bloated down below. She needed to pee.

Naturally, this was hardly the time to feel desperate, but given how things were going, it seemed

too fitting not to happen right then. Clearly her destination was rock bottom, so of course they had to hit every stop on the way...

With nothing left to do, the only tool she had in her arsenal was to express herself in the form of tears. She whimpered and sniffled, trying to keep the noise to a minimum. Otherwise, she wouldn't even be allowed to be sad on her own.

The music from above suddenly dimmed.

“Attention, shoppers, the store will now be entering Penny Protocol. An adopted Little by the name of Dawn Matthews is believed to be missing in the store. To ensure their well-being and safe return, all shoppers will be prohibited from leaving the store until this matter is resolved. We ask that you please help in searching for her. If you happen to find a lost Little, please bring them to customer services immediately.” The voice sounded urgent. The music never started again.

Finally, Dawn registered that her name was spoken over the intercom. Well, partly. Matthews wasn't her last name. Where that came from was simple guesswork...

James Matthews. Katherine Matthews.

They were looking for her?

She didn't want to be found. She didn't want to cause them trouble, but she didn't want to go on with this for a minute longer. None of this was right and she was tired of compromises. In retrospect, meandering around the hotel lobby would have been the better call, even if she had to wait there all night. She was willing to do anything to get home. To get away from here.

Without the music, the store started to seem eerily silent. Almost silent. The murmurs of Amazons started to pick up... Dawn could hear the carts rolling across the floor, the feet walking about.

Dawn kept a hand over her mouth as she rocked. Her mind was at a blank, but surrendering was the last thing she wanted.

She couldn't stop fidgeting though... It'd been something mild at first she was putting off, but it was starting to become downright annoying.

Maybe it would be better to just get it over with?

Absolutely not. Not only was it taboo, but there was something...something wrong about doing it. She'd be admitting something, or acknowledging a part of herself she wasn't willing to let go of. If she peed herself, they would win. They would all win. She'd be doing exactly what they all expected of her. Each and every one of them. Anything was better than peeing herself. Even being naked was better. Even being naked...

"I'm sorry, hon, I think I might be a bit late..." a woman passing by spoke, putting Dawn back on edge. "The store is in Penny Protocol. Lost adopted little?" She tutted disappointingly. "Poor thing... Well, no, more often than not they haven't been kidnapped. It's more along the lines of they're running away... Her parents must be worried sick. Hopefully a spanking will set her straight. But anyways, I should probably go. I still need to get Tommy's diapers. And who knows, maybe I'll find a lost Little on the way?" She chuckled. "Love you too, hon. Bye." She and her cart rolled onward.

These close calls were too much for her to handle. She was reaching both her mental and physical limits. She was completely in the dark; she had no idea when someone might be coming from her. Then again, the entire store was probably looking for her right now. If she stayed here, it was only a matter of time...

The sound of sliding metal was fast and sudden and so was the torrent of light shining through. Shocked, Dawn spun her head as she violently jumped from the surprise as she looked above. There was a hole in the surrounding wall of clothes with an Amazon behind them, looking over the different outfits. Only for a little bit, because then she looked down at Dawn with a curious look.

She was frozen. Stupefied. The two were both silent as they exchanged glances, and Dawn could feel that same cold sweat from before; a deer caught in headlights. Yet an odd warmth was leaking from Dawn, which is probably why she felt so chilled. Her lip quivered, knowing exactly what was to follow, but she couldn't bear to see it be realized. She wanted to plead, she wanted to scream. But she couldn't, she couldn't do anything. A simple state of shock took everything from her.

The Amazon smiled.

"Hello!"