

25 - Moving Goalposts

It was the two fingers against her bare back that dragged her back to the reality feeling more absurd than her own dreams. Even with a sleepy haze her muscles could move with adrenaline, which is why she was fast on her hands with a sudden and sharp inhale.

“Ope~!” Katherine’s quiet voice mumbled into her palm. Emily’s drooping eyes and few askew hairs turned around to find her blanket bundled up to her back. Her soles and calves were bare and unprotected from the lukewarm temperature, and so too was her exposed white and plastic rump, which Katherine had just been touching. As happy as she looked there was a small apology written on her face. “I’m sorry...!” she still didn’t raise her voice. “Don’t worry about me, okay? Go back to sleep.”

Just so she’d get used to sleeping through Amazons copping a feel on her?

Dawn took another sluggish breath.

“No...nope. I’m up,” and the Little forced herself into a sitting position, all the while ignoring the disappointed look coming from her captor.

“There’s nothing wrong with another half hour...” Katherine tried to reason, but if naps really did what they were advertised for, it was why Dawn was back to resting bitch face.

“I’m done napping,” Dawn declared, making no gesture but her own deadpan face that Katherine could decipher as ready to be lifted.

“Did you have a fun day with James today?” a small ‘woosh’ left her lips as Dawn ascended.

“I had *a* day with him...” Dawn dodged the question, frowning once her warm diaper sandwiched between herself and Katherine’s side. “It’s warm.”

“Warm?” Katherine furrowed her brow, and suddenly against her hip she was feeling Dawn’s forehead. “You don’t feel warm, sweetie.”

“No, not like that,” Dawn pushed her hand away. “Like, my...*the* diaper is warm...” The inside of it, for whatever reason.

Dawn was clear as could be, but Katherine’s confusion only seemed to compound.

“Your diaper’s warm?” she asked and Dawn flinched from yet another prod at her diaper.

“Yes! So please stop touching it!”

“Dawn, diapers can get a little warm when they get wet. Don’t worry,” she changed her tune to a confident smile. “I’ll make sure you won’t get any rashes!”

“Wh—...? I don’t need any changes. James just... A new one was put on me before I went to sleep. It’s dry.” And she would have loved to inspect the inside, but alas, she didn’t even have access to her own nether regions anymore.

“That’s right,” Katherine nodded with a praising sound, “it’s dry enough so we don’t need changies yet.” She walked them out into the hallway; far brighter than her blacked-out room.

Dry enough. Did she hear her right?

“N-no...I’m not wet, because I wouldn’t have...”

Then Dawn squirmed. It was warm. Thicker. Just slightly, but enough to be bothered by it to begin with. *Wet...? When? How?!*

“Sweetheart, what’s got you so squirmy?” Katherine half-smiled on their walk downstairs.

“I-I...I’m *wet!* I didn’t do that!”

“You didn’t?” Katherine feigned surprise, like it was a game. Because of course it was. In a world without Littles and Amazons— such a wonderful place indeed, the same thing would sound so astoundingly absurd. “Then who did, huh? Huh?” and she playfully teased, running away with a misunderstanding that Dawn was making light of a very concerning thing.

“I *didn’t!*” Dawn cried. Christ, she *did* do it, but not willingly! Not consciously! Unconsciously? When she was asleep? How? The last time bedwetting was a blip on her radar was at a time when she could actually see herself needing pullups. Not in her college years! “W-wait, that drink! James got me some thing from a fast food place and—”

“--James got you lunch?” Katherine raised her eyebrows and the corners of her mouth widened. “Sounds like you got quite the treat! I bet that’s because you did such a great job at the Doctor’s today,” and she giggled contently with her final foot coming off the last step.

“*Katherine!*” Dawn tried again for legitimate, unfiltered attention, and just when she may have gotten it, the front door opened.

“We’re ba–!” James’ shout stopped halfway through the door. Waver moved inside right with him but never far enough to make his leash go taut. On the contrary, he circled the man just to get it off of him. “Sorry, thought you might’ve been upstairs.”

“Just a second ago we were,” Katherine smiled as her torso playfully turned left and right. “Awh...” she had a guilty giggle as she fixed a few strands of Dawn’s hair, who was trying to lean away.

“J-James!” Dawn tried to ignore the fussing. “That drink! What was in it?”

“Drink?” James asked, and Dawn watched his eyes pan over to his wife.

“Dawn, it’s okay if you wet your diaper?” Katherine squeezed her.

“No it isn’t! Not...not when I didn’t mean to! James, that fast food place or whatever. What drink was that?”

“You didn’t give her anything from the Amazon menu, did you?” Suddenly Katherine was in Dawn’s corner, only for all the wrong reasons.

“No, I made sure not to,” James assured his wife while he set Waver free. “Just some fruit punch, I think?”

Just fruit punch? *No!* There had to be something to it...! It must have been the same feeling as they went upstairs. The lack of feeling altogether. The light tingle and suddenly she was wetting herself.

“Did you make sure to change her before putting her down?” Katherine asked as she rubbed the frustrated Little’s back.

“Uh-huh, I did. Maybe not as good as you, though...”

“I checked,” Katherine chuckled, “you did fine! Now I wish *you* were doing fine,” Katherine looked down at Dawn who was still quite upset.

“You don’t understand...” Dawn mumbled. Was this permanent? She didn’t lose her bladder control, did she? Over a single stupid drink? Or what if it was like those horrible chocolates? Just a temporary effect?

“Dawn?” Katherine whispered for her attention. “Sweetheart, no one’s upset with you, you know?”

“I don’t care about that! It’s...you won’t even believe me...!”

“And we do believe you, honey. Sometimes James and I just might see things a little differently, okay? We’d *never* let you do or have something if we thought it might be dangerous to you.”

“Th-then why did I get that drink?!” She knew it was shitty to be accusatory after the fact, only showing concern well after the deed had been done, but it was her body at stake. How couldn’t she be emotional?

“Dawn, what you had was something hundreds of thousands of Littles have every day,” James explained. “I made sure and even checked that it was safe for you, and I still stand by that. Remember all the stuff Dr. Wexler talked about today? I didn’t just forget that all, you know?”

Yes, of course. Tucked away in one of his most important filing cabinets was a Little-trician’s worst propaganda and pseudo-science imaginable.

“Do you want me to take your temperature, will that help?” Katherine offered, and Dawn tried not to look offended.

“No. Just forget it...” she sighed. All this confusion, misdirection and total lack of understanding made her want to take another nap already.

“We need to call and schedule something tonight, by the way,” James said to Katherine who simply nodded.

“Mhm, we’ll do that tonight. You said you got her number, right?”

“Yeah, I left it on the fridge.”

“Put me down already...” Dawn moaned.

It was another typical night, unfortunately. Typical to Dawn now had only the most negative of connotations. All she could do was mindlessly walk around and try to ignore almost every sense of stimuli. Could anyone blame her? Her choices were between toys, cartoons, Amazons that

never understood her point of view, or a dog. In truth, Waver wasn't all that bad, but she couldn't run that well dry so quickly.

Dinner was another meal made by chef James. No silverware for Dawn, of course, and another messy eating session all over again.

"I'm not taking a bath," Dawn declared as her face was wiped clean.

"That's right, not tonight, you aren't," Katherine patted her head, gently framing it like Dawn never had a choice to begin with. "If I knew how sleepy baths made you, we could have read a little bit of that story earlier."

That's right, the book. Life was so confusing and miserable now she was forgetting the few minute pleasures she had left. Books. Reading. She wanted to read, but the best she had now were the few diaper commercial adverts on TV and the packaging lingo on her very own hiding under the changing table.

"Still wanna read some tonight?" Katherine had her by the shoulders, looking beside her with an expectant grin.

And even now, with what sounded like a done, guaranteed deal, Dawn still couldn't allow her hopes to run wild and free. Doubt was just something she was learning to live with in constant and unending supply. Something could happen and make her angry or upset. She'd be "throwing a tantrum" and her choices and privileges would be like toys— they could be taken away.

Nothing worth living for felt tangible, which is why the carrot on the end of the stick was losing its worth if she couldn't have it right then and there.

"No?" Katherine started to frown at the silent, contemplative look on the girl's face.

"Yeah," Dawn blinked, "I do." She really did. So badly. But even access to her own hobbies was a fickle thing now.

Naturally she didn't sound enthusiastic, and that alone had Katherine less than smiling. She tilted her head with a slight frown.

"What if we went and read some right now?"

The Little blinked, then turned her head.

“Right now?” Dawn repeated.

“Uh-huh,” Katherine nodded again with a slight smile.

The fact she was trying to consider some kind of trick or loophole was what hurt her the most. She couldn’t even enjoy the simplest, purest things without suspicion now. She had been wronged too many times.

“I...I guess...”

“Do you not wanna? We don’t have to,” Katherine said.

“N-no, I want to...” Dawn went quiet as quickly as she started. *Christ, why do I have to sound like I want it that badly?!*

The Amazon leaned over just a little more, finally smiling with a small giggle. “Then that’s what we’re gonna do!”

And Dawn tried not to wait with bated breath. Getting what she wanted sounded like the silliest thing imaginable. She watched James and Katherine washing dishes as best as she could while staying out of their way and petting Waver who happened to be hanging around.

A small, but tangible tinge hit her bladder, and while there was a moment’s struggle, ultimately the front of her diaper was suddenly growing warmer. The battle lasted longer than it did this morning, but the significant lack of control made her sick to her stomach.

It was coming back, right? Her control?

“Oh, I talked with Cynthia today over the phone,” Katherine said to her husband, shoulder to shoulder over the sink.

“Yeah? Good stuff?”

“Good,” she nodded, “but she did talk about coming over this weekend...” she explained in a hushed voice. She might have hoped, but the running water and dog fur wasn’t enough to distract Dawn.

“Maybe we should wait on that,” James suggested, and his wife nodded.

“I tried, and I think I got the point across...”

“It’s because of me?” Dawn spoke up.

A half-second of silence was likely all the surprise she got from showing that she could hear, but the delay didn’t last long.

“No, you didn’t do anything wrong, hon,” James said over the counter.

“That’s right. It’s just a little tricky because we’re all so busy now!” Katherine explained as vaguely and dismissively as she could, but Dawn could read between the lines.

She was an anomaly. An unexpected “surprise,” mostly. She was a temporary stay and currently caught in some net with some government group trying to stick their fingers in her wellbeing. Everything was in flux and trying to explain a complex, multi-layered situation to an outsider was just an exercise in futility. As for going to work with Katherine and being exposed to so many of her coworkers...well, at least in their eyes, probably some things couldn’t be helped.

“Mm. Well, sorry about that,” Dawn apologized just for show. “I hope I’ll be out of your hair soon enough. I can’t imagine it’s gonna take that much longer for me to get home.”

“Don’t say something like that!” Katherine sweetly admonished. “Dawn, you are no trouble at all!” the Amazon fanned her wet hands, wiped them down then quickly came around with open arms. “Busy does not mean bad, okay?” She was back to holding the Little in her arms.

“Yeah, I know it’s not,” though in this case she wished it was. “But I mean, we all need to get on with our lives, right? So I bet we’re all looking for this to be over quickly as possible...?” Dawn again fished for some common ground.

“Well, however long it takes, we don’t mind,” James added, hitting a mark far off from where Dawn was suggesting.

“Yeah, but you must have some idea, right? What kind of stuff have you found out?” The situation was slightly shifting as Dawn asked a bit more seriously. “Stuff about getting me home?”

“Now that LPS is seeing us regularly, we need to be a bit more relaxed about how we’re gonna do things. For now we just want to do as we’re told, and that means keeping track and taking care of you.”

The Little blinked with a slightly bewildered look.

“W-wait, hold on— So you stopped? You haven’t been doing anything? Since when?!”

“Dawn...” Katherine softly said.

James wasn’t frowning, but he wasn’t peppy with his talk either. “LPS won’t be happy with us if they find out we’re trying to look for things like that, Dawn.”

There was yet another fundamental misunderstanding and she was getting upset all over again.

“What, things to take me home? Aren’t they supposed to want what’s in my best interest?!”

“They do,” James nodded. And his total agreement made the Little even more confused.

“Dawn, maybe we can go read some right now, huh?” Katherine tried to deflect, and the sign of trying to change course made the Little even more concerned.

“So what’s wrong with taking me home?!” Dawn asked in an outburst.

“Because everyone feels differently about the best thing to do,” James calmly explained.

“Differently? Wh—...in what world do people think keeping someone from their home is in their best interest?!”

“Hey, why don’t we talk about something else...?” Katherine again tried to intervene, but to no avail, James wasn’t being hostile, and neither was Dawn, but her emotions were certainly running rampant.

Finally, James blinked, then looked slightly above Dawn. Staring at Katherine, he said on the spot, “We should tell her.”

A sudden blinding spotlight shined on them. The curtain came back and just a few cogs in the machine were visible.

“Tell me what?” Dawn looked at James, then spun her head up at Katherine who was looking less than pleased.

“James...” Katherine frowned.

“Even if she won’t understand, she has a right,” James defended his point, but Dawn could feel the Amazon woman holding her tighter.

“Understand what? And yes! I *do* have a right!”

“And that’s something we need to plan for so we can have a proper family discussion about,” Katherine signaled her disapproval.

“I don’t need discussions! Just tell me already!” Dawn fumed.

“Dawn,” James briefly glanced at his wife before continuing, “LPS wants what’s best for all adopted Littles, right?”

“But I’m not adopted.”

“No, you’re not,” James nodded, “Let me rephrase that; LPS wants what’s best for all Littles in the care of Amazons.”

She desperately wanted to poke another hole in the logic, but she bitterly knew that it had no bearing on reality.

“And that means you’re our number one priority, okay?” Katherine softly explained, which Dawn more or less ignored.

“There’s a lot of nice Amazons with a lot of love to give, Dawn,” James started, and Dawn already knew she didn’t like where it was going. “Especially for Portal Littles, we want you to feel safe and cared for. In a lot of ways that your original home can’t.”

“But it’s not about what *you* want! It’s about what *I* want! *Me!*” Dawn threw up her hands. “How are you gonna say all that after we’ve talked so many—!”

“-What I’m saying now Dawn isn’t necessarily me,” James calmly interrupted. “This is just what a lot of Amazons think here, but that includes LPS. LPS is a big group of people, Dawn, with a lot of power, and for good reason. They’re the people that can step in when they see a Little is in danger or an Amazon mistreating them and solve the problem. They can move a Little somewhere safer or make it so an Amazon isn’t allowed to care for a Little.”

“Yeah, and that’s great,” and as much as they were mistreating her, where was her legal intervention? God, why didn’t she just turn them in already?! Hell, she could think of a thousand different faces she’d already seen between the doctor’s, the library and down the fucking street that’d constitute as gross prison-worthy mistreatment. Did they just turn a blind eye to this corner of the world?

“LPS thinks that this place and this dimension is the safest place for Littles, Dawn, and taking you anywhere else is a risk for your own safety and health.”

“How, though?! How is taking me back where I’ve lived my whole life a risk to my safety?! Isn’t keeping me here more dangerous because it’s somewhere I’ve never been?!” What kind of logic did they use? How many hoops and gymnastics did even the most powerful groups here operate on to get their own way? She knew enough to begin to understand that LPS saw her as a child. That much made sense. But to decide at the same time she shouldn’t be allowed to go back from where she came?

“Nobody said we’re not gonna stop looking, Dawn, but we just need to be a little patient right now, okay?” James gently explained, but Dawn wasn’t having any of it. Not one single fucking bit.

“So what? We’re just *waiting*?! For how long?!” Dawn shouted as she tried to move, but Katherine held her against her hip. She pushed and squirmed but she was hardly going anywhere. “How long am I supposed to put *my* life on pause until people who have no right to it are satisfied?!”

“Can I go read you that story now?” Katherine tried to interrupt, but her voice fell on deaf ears.

“Until LPS is done checking in on us, Dawn,” James frowned, but finally as someone who seemed like they were sympathizing. “I know that’s difficult, but being patient is what we have to be right now.”

“And hey,” Katherine soothingly spoke. She lightly rested her cheek on Dawn’s head. “Nobody said anything has to get put on pause?”

Without getting violent, Dawn tried to lean her head away just to keep Katherine off of her. She didn’t want comfort. She didn’t want smothering. She wanted real answers and real progress...! How...how far did this set her back? What was the timetable before? Days? Weeks? Months? But now there was a magnifying glass over them. When did that go away? How much did that affect them? How much worse had things become?!

“*Not paused?!?*” Dawn scoffed. “Katherine, James,” she tried to sound as cut-throat as she could. As real as she could be in a shirt, diaper, relatively pint-sized, and sitting in the arms of her caregiver. “I know I don’t look like it, because I sure as hell haven’t been treated like one, but where I come from, *I’m* the adult. I’M THE GROWNUP! I go to school; *COLLEGE!* I study! I write papers! I work! I pay bills! I get to use the goddamn toilet!”

The slew of things she had said and wanted to say were starting to make her choke up. Something was wrong and she knew it. She knew it wouldn't be fast and it wouldn't be easy, and yet there wasn't enough time in the world to prepare for how downright sick, sad and pissed she would feel over the bitter truth. It'd been what, a few days now? Only just a few and yet it felt like an eternity already with only that and much more supposedly ahead of her.

She grunted as she grit her teeth and the world went blurry.

"I-I... I have a family back home...! Waiting for me! Can you even understand that? Do you people even *get* what you're keeping me from?" her breath couldn't keep up as the deafening silence suffocated her.

"K-Katherine!" she clutched the Amazon's shirt, trying not to bawl her eyes out with every fiber of her small being. "Remember how you felt when I left? Ran away? Imagine if you were my *real* mom, except I was *really* gone. So far away you'd never see me again. My life *IS* on pause because it's been stopped COMPLETELY!"

James spoke from afar, "Dawn, we'll find—"

"--WE WON'T FIND ANYTHING!" the Little screamed. "P-people...people who care about me...they don't even know where I am...! My boyfriend...! The man *I* wanted to marry— *MY* James...!" she couldn't hold back as her trembling voice broke down more and more.

"H-how long...?" a sad, maddening laugh puffed from her lips wet with rolling tears. "How long do you think until I'm declared dead?"

"Don't talk like that...!" Katherine mumbled with glassy eyes.

"It's going to be exactly like that stupid, *stupid* tour guide said...! They'll look for me. They'll search. They'll search for days. Weeks. Maybe months. Maybe for as long as I'm alive here. But I'll be as good as *dead*. When I get back, if I ever will, everyone will have moved on. My school will kick me out, my parents will make peace with losing their only daughter, my friends will forget me, a-and...and Luke...!" she sniffled as best as she could, but she'd finally hit the end of her rope.

Her lungs were operating on air they didn't have and her overexerted emotions were paying the price for it. She didn't have the strength for putting on fronts or keeping dignity, especially when a hand belonging to a giantess was pushing her head against her shoulder.

She sobbed and sobbed. Cried and cried. A hand kept stroking her back over and over. It was big, soft and assuring, but something so real couldn't affect the girl's thoughts eating away at herself from the inside. Simply speaking her worst fears was the key to unlocking a box of chaos.

Aside from the calm, quiet coos and reminders just to breathe, that's all Dawn could hear from the Amazons. Nothing else. Not a peep. And to think, all it took was one little mental breakdown just to get some peace and quiet.

Minutes went by of absolutely nothing. Dawn could tell they were moving, even with her face buried in Katherine's shoulder. Up? Down? Left and right? Probably just about every direction possible at some point.

And all the while, that whole time Dawn cried less and less simply because her body couldn't make any more tears, the sore, sad feelings were only compounded by a sense of powerlessness. She had spoken her piece and yet she knew it meant nothing. It was a massive step just to break herself into pieces and confront reality, but there was no reward for her own self-destruction.

She wouldn't be going home any faster. She wasn't magically abdicated of diapers nor did she look like any less of a basket case needing constant supervision. Hell, that's probably the only thing that just got worse.

But finally, her red, puffy eyes came up from the shirt and Dawn's tired eyes adjusted to the light. Turning her head, she wasn't surprised to see Katherine, though she was slightly unsure of where they were. It was a room she didn't recognize and had yet to ever visit. Tall, mighty shelves stood from floor nearly to the high ceiling where a skylight above let the darkness of the night flow in. A tidied plant with long, flowering vines curled across the top of a shelf and down its side, teeming with bright green life against the lightly stained wood.

At this point Dawn was laying against Katherine and her chest. They were in an alcove atop a padded seat spanning from wall to wall in the mini-massive library, right against the massive window beside them trimmed with washed-out purple curtains.

It was all massive. So large and so mighty. It was a room the size of a library that only existed in mansions, Dawn might imagine. It was so big. So huge. Yet to Katherine it must have seemed standard, or above average at most. After all, Dawn herself was just another little trinket in the giantess' lap.

"Where are we...?" Dawn's tired, dry throat croaked.

"My reading room," Katherine softly spoke with a small, distant smile. "Are you thirsty...?"

She was.

“No.”

“If you are, it’s right here, okay?” Katherine lifted the sippy cup from her side where it’d been resting by the window. Then she set it back down, and Dawn could feel herself slowly fall as a massive exhale left the Amazon’s chest.

“Where’s James?”

“In his office. He had to finish some stuff.” Her words were soft. Calm. Collected. Minutes would go by between each and every question, and Katherine didn’t make any move to try and get things going any faster. Everything completely went at Dawn’s pace.

“Why are we here?” Maybe she would have been surprised to see a sea of books hiding away in the house, but at the same time she wasn’t. She didn’t know how to feel about anything anymore.

“Ever since I was little,” Katherine stared up and above at the wall in front of her, resting her palm on Dawn’s head, “whenever I was stressed, angry, or upset, I’d always want to go to my room. I’d read and read. So many books until there were so many stories in my head that I didn’t have to think about my own.”

“And when you run out?” Dawn mumbled, and a small laugh left Katherine.

“Then I do what I do right now... I sit down and look at all the books I’ve read, then remember each and every story. One by one.”

Her eyes wandered for a moment, falling on one of the shelves missing a significant chunk of reading material that the Portal Little couldn’t help but feel was once there.

“What about there...?” her limp finger pointed in the general direction.

“Mm?” Katherine rolled her head that way. “Oh, that’s a spot for some new books I’m waiting on. Sometimes I like to make space for new stuff, so I put the old books in the attic.”

So there was an attic, too.

Dawn reached over Katherine’s chest, looking for what the Amazon quickly lifted into her hand. She stared at the sippy cup, expecting to find a red tint of telltale juice, but there was none.

Water.

Her parched and prickling throat took each and every drop with gluttonous greed, but just to make the suck and flow steady and uninterrupted, she turned herself around until Katherine's chest was a pillow for the girl's head. Dawn glanced out the window, seeing the street far below, illuminated by a streetlamp.

"Am I supposed to apologize now?" Dawn asked.

"For what, honey?" Katherine asked with a confused voice.

"For making a scene? Yelling? Swearing?" Everything she had been scolded for before?

"...We wish you didn't behave that way...but no, you're not going to be punished. You weren't being fresh with me, or James... Y-you..." a long, low inhale then exhale went through the woman. "You're going through a lot, but I know that can be a lot sometimes. Enough when it's not fair to expect you to be your best 100% of the time."

There wasn't anyone else to talk to. No one other than James who could be rigid in his own ways. She didn't have any other kind of support system than the one she had so many grievances with. So many issues and misgivings that left her wondering if there was really any support at all. But she was worn out and tired. And unfortunately, Katherine was a big body to hold onto. Something to clutch and cry into. Scream at and yell. Something that could at least acknowledge her. Something that reminded her she really was alive, as dead as she felt and effectively was.

Her peers were going back to school. Studying and working, earning degrees while she was stuck in diapers and drooling in a crib. She had toys and cardboard storybooks to flip through while the rest of the world wasn't sparing a second thought to how one of its very own vanished into thin air.

"I-I..." Dawn hiccupped. "I wanna go home...!"

"...I know..." Katherine held her close. "I just want you to be happy... I'm gonna give you as many hugs and kisses as I can if it helps even the tiniest bit. I want to know how you're always feeling so I can fix it and make it better when you aren't, but I'm still learning how to do that... I want us to read stories together, play games, all three of us go to fun places and do exciting things..."

I know you miss your mom, and you're right... I can't imagine how that feels...! I wish I could. I want so badly to take every bad feeling you have just so you'll only ever have the good ones...! It's not fair what happened, and what we have now is just how things are," she chuckled through her tears. "No matter what happens though, Dawn, I need you to know as much as James and I are gonna keep trying to show you: this *is* your home, okay? You're *not* a stranger here. Yes, you're here for the long-haul, sweetheart, but it's not like you're at a hotel?"

And the Little tried to shake her head. "No...! My home isn't here! It's in-!"

"And it's okay to have two homes," Katherine gently draped her arm over Dawn's stomach. "I said it, didn't I? I love you soo much, and nothing's gonna change that. You don't have to love me back, because not even you're gonna change my mind," Katherine declared through her few last tears.

It was Katherine in her overbearing splendor all over again. A shower of affection that Dawn never wanted, nor asked for. So much attention and care coated over a thick layer of mistreatment and mutilation of her maturity and independence.

"And whether you like it or not..." Against Dawn's will, a pair of lips touched the top of her head. "*We're* your family, too. So don't cry, please? You're not alone. You're not gone. You're just someplace else with people that love you just as much. You didn't disappear because I have you in my arms right now, and I'm never letting go. Waver's not going. James isn't, and neither am I."

Home... So far away. A distance so far that it can't even be quantified. Yet some pseudo-stranger was trying to convince her that it was right here, and she was sitting right in the middle of it. It hurt. It hurt so much. All it was now was putting on appearances (poorly) and dealing with people just as an effort to survive until she could go home. There was no resting period. No time to be herself. No chance at letting her guard down until everything just exploded all at once. It was only by the great mercy of some cruel god who put her here that she was among merciful giants each and every time she couldn't keep herself together.

And every time, as a matter of fact, it was always with these two...

Two people that'd dealt with her screaming, kicking and crying so many times now. Her bitchy attitudes and downright disdain and hatred for the world. They were her objects of everything negative and wrong about this world. They were every single problem bottled into one. Convenient cans to kick around just because they let her. All of that, and yet here they were, still knocking on the door over and over again. Spouting stupid idealistic things like unconditional

love and care for a person they barely knew. And Amazons were meant to be intelligent? Intellectually, maybe, but emotionally and socially so, probably not.

There was nowhere to run, though. Nowhere to hide that Katherine or James couldn't be. They were manipulative, but as much as it made Dawn's blood boil, they were trying. Trying in their own horrible way. She was a broken record now with how many times she had reflected and reset with these two. Yet here she was, still living with them. Yet to be kicked to the curb to be someone else's problem. When was the "unconditional" love going to wear off? When did they decide Dawn and all her otherworldly problems just weren't worth it? By tomorrow? Two days from now? Ten? Or maybe when she got too expensive. Maybe after all the stupid baby machinations Big Brother told them to buy they'd reach some kind of limit in their literal and mental budget.

If only Dawn could read minds.

"If I can do anything in my power to make you comfy right now, what would it be?" Katherine whispered soothingly.

And for once, Dawn didn't need more than a second to speak her mind.

"Let me go to bed."

A new day, a new set of unexpected twists and turns.

Dawn was sitting in her seat at the table, tearing off a corner of sugared French toast on her plate trying to not look confused, or at least perturbed. She felt fairly certain that it was a workday, and yet there both James and Katherine were, sitting either across or beside her.

"Sleep good?" James asked Dawn, catching her in the middle of a swig of water from her open-lid sippy cup. A hand traced the back of her scalp

"You can't ask her when her mouth is full!" Katherine stared fun and playful daggers at her husband.

"It's the best time to ask, isn't it? It gives her time to think!" James sipped from his mug.

“Mmm...” Katherine hummed with a grin, then much more sensually she asked Dawn, “Sleep good, sweetheart?” Her voice sounded like it was hinging much more on the side of concern, especially because she was the one who put her to bed.

“Yeah,” Dawn nodded, though without eye contact for anyone in particular. “I did—!” her knee jerked and would have hit the table, had her bucket seat let her kick any higher. A cold, wet and sandpaper-y sensation stroked itself across the sole of her naked foot. Her face shriveled and scrunched as monsters and mysteries did unspeakable things to her from below.

James and Katherine both looked puzzled, then proceeded to scooch out their chairs and look (something Dawn’s baby seat didn’t allow for) at what caused the yelp from the Little. Suddenly James was laughing and Katherine was holding a hand over her mouth.

“What? What is it?” Dawn tried to look over her chair with little success, then tried the other direction with just as much. Nothing to be seen. Nothing until—

A familiar tuft of something. She narrowed her eyes, staring down at a thumping rod of fur.

“You fed him, right?” James laughed at Katherine.

“I did!” Katherine complained with a giggle. “We’re gonna have to start putting socks on this munchkin just to keep her cute little toes safe~! And you, silly little pooch!” Dawn could see Katherine’s hand go under the table and suddenly pull it back out with a whole doggy in tow.

“Licking feet is bad manners, mister,” Katherine sternly instructed with a wagging finger down at the dog.

After Waver’s brief public humiliation for indulging in shameful acts, Dawn went back to eating, mostly quiet as she listened on. It was a halfway decent morning, given her diaper was dry. Whatever she was given yesterday had finally worked its way out of her system. Did it make her diapers any less wet in the end? Unfortunately not. But at least she could prepare her embarrassment for something *she* was making a conscious choice to do.

It was a simple breakfast, oddly enough. Water. French toast. Bacon. Banana. And...no eggs.

Which was strange.

James just punctured his yolk ready to burst with the tip of his fork. Katherine was slicing off a section of her rubbery imitation of food. Meanwhile, Dawn had no unfortunate white and yellow to deal with herself. Had it been Christmas she might even declare it a miracle. Everything on

her plate were things she had no real qualms with eating. A food she didn't like wasn't being forced on her for once.

Then it also occurred to her that she didn't know the plans for the day. Who was taking her? Where was she going? She tried her best to turn around in her seat. What time was it, even?

"Everything okay?" Katherine was already leaning into her view. "Oh, did you want these cut up?" and her fork and knife were already dicing Dawn's remainder of sugary buttered bread.

"What's going on?" Dawn finally let out her suspicions. "Is something going on?"

"Well yeah," James seemed forthright. "Breakfast?"

Dawn proceeded to frown, and James' wife gave him a conflicted smile.

She was hardly willing to take any kind of bait, much less feed into any sort of fun, so the Little huffed. "Fine. Don't tell me."

"Hey, hey," James tried to get the mood back, but Katherine was already jumping in.

"James is just excited he's off from work. He can get a little jokey like that," Katherine explained.

"What?" Dawn thought about it twice. "Why isn't he working today?"

"I took some time off," James answered much more transparently.

"...And I took some time off, too," Katherine added. Dawn blinked.

What was there to say or ask? None other than: "Uhm...why?"

"Well," James took the lead, "Kat and I talked a lot last night, and we decided that we should take a break from work for a little bit. So we can focus on some more important stuff."

"You mean me." Dawn didn't look happy.

"We mean *us*," Katherine corrected. "We decided to do it for me, for James, *and* you." But in Dawn's mind all it read as just for herself. More attention she didn't want or ask for.

"Sorry, Dawn, gonna have to be stuck with both of us during the days!" James shrugged.

“I...no. No. Don’t take off work because of me. Don’t just stop your lives because I’m–”

“We’re not stopping anything,” Katherine smiled with a mug nuzzled between her hands. “This is just something we both decided to do. Don’t worry, James and I still have our jobs!” And it sounded no less fishy.

“...Well don’t do anything for my sake.” *It’s temporary, anyway...*

James made a small smile and so did Katherine. The sun really started to shine through the backyard doors.

“Well, today we’re gonna go see Doctor W. again. She sounds like a really nice person!”

“Mhm.” Dawn sounded far less than excited. After all, she had nothing to say but made-up magic when it came to Little’s bodily autonomy.

“But, after that, James and I were thinking we could maybe go get lunch somewhere? And...we could go to the park? Maybe a toy store?” No sign of a pulse yet. “A bookstore?”

She tried her best, but Dawn unfortunately twitched. She heard it and responded too quickly to stop herself.

“Yeah?” Katherine dug in deeper with a pearly-white smile. “Does that sound good?”

“Don’t let her trick you, Dawn,” James warned, “Kat just wants an excuse to buy some more books for herself...!”

“I might buy *A* book,” Katherine coolly corrected her husband. “But does that sound good?” She was speaking warmly again. “We kind of owe you a do-over since the day we met, after all...?”

Endure a single bad stop for one, potentially two good ones? No sitting in James’ office, and no having to deal with the warden of the day at the library? The fact she was even considering it made her upset, but she knew the doctor’s was happening whether she liked it or not. She was just being presented an opportunity to go from bitter to bittersweet.

“...”

She shouldn't. She didn't want to. Especially after her fit last night. All her tears and crisis. It'd be like pretending all her trauma didn't exist all over again, wouldn't it? She wanted to be mad. She wanted to be sad...

"And since we're gonna be so busy..." Katherine pondered with a finger on her lower lip. "No nap?"

Enough said. She bit down like a bear trap.

"Fine."