

12 - Communication is Key

Needing a small dose of agency, Dawn with a crinkle slid forward and off Katherine's lap, landing on her two feet. Katherine clearly looked frazzled. Her face was deep in thought, her hand was balled into a fist as she held it up to her mouth, thinking.

"Katherine? Hello?" Dawn was about to wave her hands. She was being ignored yet again, but what else was new. It wasn't new, but the frustration it generated was always fresh.

"KATHERINE!"

The Amazon wasn't scared or shocked, but apparently the might of a Little could only budge the giant a mere inch. She looked down at Dawn, finally.

"Dawn, sweetie, please; indoor voices, and no bad words..."

"I wouldn't need to shout if you just *talked* to me!" Dawn groaned. "What even was that? Who was she? Why the hell are you so bothered?!"

Katherine stood up from the couch, walking briskly to the kitchen. "Just a second, honey, I need to call James."

Dawn stomped along right behind her, albeit taking some more time. She had half a mind to remind this woman that she had promised to explain to her what was going on right after. Katherine couldn't be a better liar if she tried.

As Katherine held her phone to her ear, she'd have brief moments where she looked down at Dawn, as if to make sure she was still there and accounted for.

"Put it on speaker," Dawn tugged at the fabric wrapped around her leg. "At least let me hear what James has to say?" Christ, didn't she deserve that much at the bare minimum?

Dawn's frown only intensified once a seeming conversation began, able to hear only Katherine, and unfortunately, not James.

"James, honey?" Katherine's voice carried urgency. Great. So this was a big deal. Or so Dawn assumed, given she could only realize things based on context clues. Sure, that case worker seemed intimidating, but she had no idea of what it entailed, other than that she made Katherine put on some bullshit act of claiming to be getting a bunch of baby stuff.

“James, an LPS worker just stopped by... No, she left, and yes, Dawn’s still here,” she gave Dawn another well-being check with the phone against her ear. “Who did you run into last night? Someone filed a case about you kidnapping Dawn!”

Dawn was almost clinging her entire body on Katherine’s leg, starting to angrily drone with her shaking body, “*SPEEAAKER!*”

“J-James, I...-” She pulled the phone away. Finally, attention had been earned. “Dawn? Honey, please! This is very important, sweetheart! Why don’t you go play with Waver until I’m done talking on the phone?”

“I *know* that it’s important,” Dawn shouted, “which is why I have a right to know! Put the phone on speaker! Let me hear too!” Was it really that impossible of a demand? By this point, Dawn could only excuse the ignorance if it was straight maliciousness just to agitate the girl.

Katherine had the phone to her ear again. Outright ignored. Placated, or attempted to, at least. As she resumed the conversation with no indication whatsoever to include Dawn, she herself resorted to the one tactic that was working from the start. Back on Katherine’s calf Dawn was tugging.

“LISTEN. TO. ME!” Dawn shouted and shouted, more than willing by this point to be an absolute nuisance just to make herself heard. If she was going to be pushed away like a child, she was damn-well ready to be as irritating as one until she was treated otherwise.

Katherine’s hands were held to the phone, eyebrows sloped and a, “James, honey, give me just a second...” Katherine put the phone down and made a play Dawn didn’t quite expect. Suddenly she was lifted up by Katherine. The look on her face wasn’t the stress or worry she’d been carrying a few seconds earlier. Now it was an annoyance and a frown. “Do we need a timeout until I’m done on the phone?”

Dawn sputtered a gasp of air, completely flabbergasted by the sudden shift. “Y-you...Are you *serious?! You said you were going to talk to ME about this! Include me in the fucking conversation, Katherine! I have a right to know! Talk to me! Tell me what the hell is going on!*” If anyone needed a timeout, it was this uppity giant that apparently needed a lesson on how to share and include others. The irony was as potent as were Amazons opinionated, haughty pieces of garbage.

But she didn’t get an answer. Not the kind that treated Dawn like an independent adult. Instead, Katherine sighed as she moved to the other end of the kitchen. And Dawn, the poor fool, apparently did not have the sense to run the other way. She opened a closet door filled with all

sorts of cleaning supplies, but it wasn't a long look for Dawn because all Katherine wanted was found immediately as she dragged out a footstool with her foot, pushing it into the corner. Two sets of hands swooped her up before she could react, skyrocketing her into the air with just as graceful as a touchdown on the landing pad. Down Dawn went on it, nose pointed to the corner where two walls met. Unbelievable. Un-fucking believable! This woman couldn't be serious.

And to prove the absurdity, Dawn immediately turned her head with a chuckle of angered disbelief. "You can't be serious. You really think you can--"

"*DAWN?*" Katherine's voice raised to a point Dawn had never heard it reach, but the feeling Katherine could incite so rarely had the same effect it always had. Dawn stiffened like a board out of reflex. Whatever she thought the danger may have been, it was instinct and a primal response that made her heed caution. "You're in timeout now. Nose facing the corner, *NOW!*"

She wanted to rebut. She wanted to give her the finger and tell her otherwise, prove how wrong she was for treating her like a kid. She wanted to keep arguing like they were equals. But as Katherine stood there expectantly, standing so high above her, dressed modestly as she scolded the miniature adult in just a shirt and diaper, the footing couldn't have felt any less equal.

The sense of powerlessness and inferiority was almost immediate, as Dawn reluctantly spun her head the other way, if only just to mask her oncoming tears. Again. Again, she'd been unrightfully denied what was promised to her. Liars. They were both just fucking liars. They lied about everything, just to get their way and used their size just to bully the minority into submission!

Confined to her new figurative prison, feeling absolutely humiliated, she could only sniffle as she heard the conversation continue from the other end of the kitchen.

"James? Are you still there?" Katherine sighed. The absolute bitch, like she had the right to be upset, like Dawn was the problem and not her own ignorance. "No, everything's fine...I put Dawn in timeout. She was throwing a tantrum..."

"No I *wasn't!*" Dawn hoarsely barked, still facing the wall, wiping her tears. Where did she get off? Why did all of her complex, rightful emotions and problems always get written off like they were as small and insignificant as these Amazons treated her? Tantrums and fits. That's all they were, apparently. She could whip out the literal novels worth of bills and loan statements that chained to her ankle in a river of debt, but the best Dawn could probably rouse out of these people is "She had a rough day," or "Dawn wasn't feeling her best." That's what it was. The problem never mattered, because apparently if it registered as one to a Little, clearly it was

something too small for an Amazon to care about, which is why it was the Little reacting that mattered. Never what they reacted *to*.

“She’s upset, yes, but I’m going to talk to her after this... More importantly,” of course, because Dawn’s emotions didn’t matter in the slightest. There was always something more important than her. A greater purpose that superseded her own free will, needs and wants. “The case worker that came, she said she’s coming back unannounced later this week when we’re both home...I can tell you all the details when you come home, but you just get through your day and we’ll get through ours... She looked through the house, James...Yes... Mhm... We definitely need to get most of everything now... Is it okay if I get it delivered...?”

Get what delivered? Tell him what details? What was most of everything? Weren’t they just going shopping for clothes? A toothbrush, maybe? There was so much left to the imagination and so much information Dawn wanted to know, but she wasn’t allowed to. At least not yet. She would continue to learn only through the things that were filtered and drip-fed to her like an actual child, too small and too “immature” to be included amongst the adult conversations.

Whatever was being said on the other end of the line, it was clearly making Katherine get emotional, if her audible sniffles were any sort of tell. But in an Amazonian fashion, Dawn did her utmost to not care and write it off. Poor Katherine was just having a rough day. Dawn? Well unfortunately she just had to deal with the Amazon’s tantrum. Surely that’s what it was.

“Okay...” Katherine exhaled, hearing something apparently that was reassuring, not that Dawn would have known. “I know, thank you... We’re leaving just about right after I finish talking to you. Mhm... Okay, I love you too, see you later tonight. Bye.”

Dawn didn’t swivel her head or make an attempt to look behind from where she was. Half of her was pissed, and the other half was small and belittled. Yet both halves reasoned that her well-being came best with compliance at least in that moment.

She could hear Katherine sniffle for just a little longer, seemingly distraught. If only Dawn could know the full extent as to why.

“Dawn?” Katherine spoke softly, comfortingly. It was warm and with open arms, yet by this point it all felt like some cruel trick. A mere act of deception just to strut the gullible girl along as much as she needed to be. “Are you ready to come out from the corner?”

Was she ready. Was she fucking ready?

“Are *you* ready to keep your promise?” Dawn grumbled with her back still to the rest of the room. Her head was so hot she could barely keep herself in check. The promise almost didn’t even matter for the same reason anymore. She was starting to care less about what this all was and simply wanted to hold Katherine’s feet to the fire. She wanted her to pay in some way for breaking her promise. For once again betraying Dawn in so many tiny different ways until the bigger picture looked like what Dawn was feeling. An absolute mess.

“Please, sweetie, I needed to talk to James on the phone. It’s hard for me to hear if you’re being--”

“Why didn’t you put it on speaker then? Why couldn’t I hear too?!” Now Dawn turned her head around. Maybe without a convenient excuse held to Katherine’s ear, she’d actually explain why she had been so dismissive and patronizing. “And stop calling me ‘sweetie’! Use my actual name!”

Katherine took a brief look at her, clearly dealing with her own thoughts before speaking. “...Dawn, I know you’re upset because it feels like I treated you unfairly. I’m sorry for putting you in timeout.” Like that was what Dawn wanted to hear. She wasn’t getting an apology, she was getting an explanation yet again for why she was wrong and too inferior to understand the “grand” things above her head. “But, I wasn’t trying to tie James up with all of us. He’s at work right now and we can’t bother him, so I wanted to let him know right away. Does that make sense?”

Of course it made sense. It always had to make sense. It made all the sense in the world. A concrete amount of immovable fact and logic that no matter how Dawn attacked it, she’d always be made out to be the fool. She was trapped in a game designed with rules stacked against her in every conceivable way. Whether there was fairness to her words or not, Dawn had been pushed along far too many times to have any kind of leniency by this point.

“Sure.” Dawn almost growled, seething.

“But now, since that’s taken care of, I can tell you some of what I told James, okay?” Then came a calm smile, trying to appeal to whatever simple side she thought there was to Dawn. As if a pinch of respect after an entire gauntlet of humiliation and belittling could be washed away so easily.

Her attention hinged on her last sentence, though. “Some”. Dawn had half a mind to question why not all of it, and only *some* of what he said. But she couldn’t. She didn’t want to. Every encounter with this woman felt like such an insurmountable obstacle, beating her down so heavily until she gave in to a “compromise” that left her crippled and wounded.

“I get it. That person came because a crazy Amazon reported James. What was she? Police? For Littles?”

The discomfort on Katherine’s face was beyond evident. But silently, Dawn thought herself to be thankful only because that discomfort didn’t seem to be charged at Dawn. That case worker was what bothered the Amazon.

“No, they’re not quite the same...” Then Dawn could sense it. A filter. She was choosing her words carefully.

“Uh-huh?” Dawn annoyedly nodded, implying she was expecting much more than a single sentence. James got an entire fucking speech as far as she was concerned.

“Little Protective Services work for the government and make sure all adopted Littles are in safe, loving homes with good Mommies and Daddies...” Katherine explained slowly whilst Dawn tried not to physically cringe. Why couldn’t she just say it for what it was. It was more “bad medicine” and “naughty language” talk. Out of principle the angered woman wanted to walk away.

Hearing that as an explanation for that woman and knowing full-well her presence was associated with Dawn’s being here, associated her with that horrible, disgusting spiel. Just from interacting with that agent of evil without even knowing the danger she faced was annoying enough.

“I’m not adopted though.” Dawn curtly reminded her. “And you’re not my...*guardian*.” She stressed the neutral term. “And neither is James.”

“Not officially, no...” Katherine agreed, but not fully. Christ, it always irked Dawn so much; she could never get any kind of answer from her that ever agreed completely. “That case worker came today because someone reported that James was kidnapping you, meaning that he took you away from your Mommy or Daddy...”

“But I don’t have one!” Dawn couldn’t stress enough. Obviously Katherine wasn’t the one really saying it, she was just the mouthpiece, but there was a long list of reasons that put her on Dawn’s shit-list, so why not dish out the aggravation to her anyway?

And then came the magic words.

“It’s not that simple...” Katherine frowned, drifting in thought once again. “Even before Littles are adopted officially, they can still be caught in kidnapping cases... For example, if James took you after someone else already claimed you—”

“But she didn’t!” Dawn shouted, vividly remembering that horrid woman in the room next door. “She’s lying! And I know she is!”

“Well, sweetheart, we can’t say for sure who—”

“I KNOW WHO REPORTED ME!” Dawn screamed with never-ending frustration. “And *stop!*” She took a breath, “*Stop* calling me all those stupid names! Just call me Dawn! Treat me with at least some respect...!”

“Dawn, I’m sorry, hone-- I...I’m sorry.” Katherine doubled down it would seem. “I *do* respect you.” She paused again, likely choking down another pet name. “I’m sure you do know who may have reported James,” the look on her face and the tone in her voice made Dawn unsure whether it was more patronizing comments or genuine belief. “But even if we know, it won’t affect the issue...”

“Does my word mean nothing?” Dawn wiped her eyes. “I tried telling that stupid case worker that she was lying and that I went willingly! She just wrote me off like I was an actual kid that didn’t know any better!” It almost felt surreal, pouring herself out to Katherine, of all people, about a *different* Amazon that had treated her as something less than.

“Your words mean absolutely everything,” Katherine smiled, but in a way that felt like lip-service, or at the most, words that mattered only to Katherine and James, which presently did not feel like a whole lot. Beyond them, it was just senseless babblings from a deemed toddler.

“But in these kinds of situations they have to investigate everything very carefully, even if someone might be lying.”

“So what...what happens now? They’re not actually going to make me go back to that person, are they?” Finally reaching the crux of the issue, Dawn was finally finding a reason to be afraid.

“Absolutely not.” Katherine’s face was now one of certainty. But with how she’d been so distraught and worried between the phone and meeting the LPS worker, Dawn wasn’t sure if it was just baseless confidence or legitimate certainty. “They’re going to see that James brought you here fairly and there wasn’t any kidnapping at all.” Her confidence faltered, however. “But LPS is very strict when it comes to safe environments for Littles... I know you aren’t adopted,

but they see you as that right now. I know you don't like hearing that, but if someone says that you've been kidnapped, it means that you've been taken from someone."

Semantics. Is that really what would do her in?

"And I need you to not get upset about this part, okay?" Katherine waited for a response.

She was going to get upset. "Fine." Dawn nodded, practically crossing her fingers. No guarantees about that.

"Now that LPS is involved, even if the report is fake, we can't give them any reason that might make them think that we aren't taking the absolute best care of you, okay?"

She didn't immediately understand, and that was exactly why she had such a bad feeling. Dawn quietly and slowly nodded her head.

"So when we go shopping, we're going to need to get you some things that'll make things easiest and comfy for you while you're here. That sounds nice, right?"

"Like a bed...?" Dawn asked. True, she wasn't planning on getting one, nor did she expect them to shell out for her on something as long-term as that.

Katherine's eyes lit up as a small smile formed. "Yes! A crib, and things like that. Diapers, toys, comfy clothes; everything that'll help you--"

"W-wait," Dawn stammered, truly believing that she just heard Katherine wrong. "Did you say a crib...?" She took a small breath, knowing to tackle it one piece at a time, and know for god-damned sure that she did mishear the other grotesque things as well. *Diapers?*

"Well..." Kather started with her words as that same unintentionally condescending look came about her. "We need to get you something that's appropriate to sleep in, Dawn...?"

"Yeah," Dawn repeated, "A bed. A normal bed. One that I can climb in and out of; not a cage!" This wasn't happening. She knew James and Katherine always liked to push the envelope, but at least it was subtle. This was far from that. Forget dipping their toes, Katherine was trying to shove her in the pool head-first.

"That's going to be difficult, Dawn..." Katherine gave the same frown she always did whenever there were no other options that she was really going to humor, feasible or not. Her gentle way of telling Dawn to shut up and accept what was going to happen, regardless of her feelings. "There

aren't a lot of places that make grown-up beds for Littles...they cost more, and I don't know if it's the safest choice right now..."

"But don't you get it!" Dawn cried out. "You just said it yourself! 'Grown-up bed!' I sleep in a grown-up bed, not a stupid fucking crib! I'll sleep on the couch! Or I'll sleep in the same thing I did last night!"

"You can't do that," Katherine said simply. "What if you rolled off the couch in your sleep? That's too dangerous."

"I don't roll in my sleep!" Dawn countered, but quickly saw how idiotic it was to think that Katherine would actually believe her.

"You need a proper bed, Dawn," Katherine insisted, "We have to show we're giving you a safe environment, which means your own space and your own bed. Don't you want to have your own mattress to sleep on?"

"Sure, but not a crib!" Dawn tried again, but no matter which angle she took, Katherine continued to dance around her words or contradict them entirely.

"Tell you what, I promise we'll find something we're both happy with, okay?" She smiled like the sun had just shone on their miserable situation, and Dawn knew how much of a deceiving trick her "bargain" was. It was going to be a crib no matter what, which is why Dawn would never be happy with anything. "Happy" merely meant Katherine's happiness and Dawn's begrudging compliance.

"Why...why can't I just keep the way things are now?" Dawn moaned tiredly and with sadness. "Will that woman really take me away just because I'm not in a crib?"

Katherine's smile faded as she slightly nodded. "Something like that could happen...but I promise, James and I are never going to let that happen."

Even if every step they take goes against every fiber of my being...

Dawn hated all of this. She hated every tiny little thing about all she'd experienced thus far. But given a fresh dose of minute hope made her realize just how much further she could fall. How much worse it could actually get.

“That’s all we’re getting, with *normal* clothes. Right?” Dawn’s voice was on edge, but deep down, she knew that there was more. Her ears weren’t playing tricks. Maybe she was a masochist at that moment, just looking for another way for Katherine to gaslight her.

“We’ll see what they have.” Katherine said very little, unusually uncharacteristic of her.

But it was another eureka for Dawn, remarking silently how Katherine made a decision she hadn’t expected. She was choosing her battles. Delaying them for another time. Dawn knew damn well there was more to this shopping trip, and her “tantrum” would wait until they got to the store. Katherine just didn’t want to deal with it now, for whatever reason.

Fine then. Dawn would hold the illusion to her heart like it was gospel, then use every moment, every second once that curtain was pulled to remind Katherine of what a horrid, absolutely terrible trickster she was. The farthest thing from a saint and the vilest of all people. Deceitful, cruel, and horrible. It was her poison she’d laced the atmosphere with, and it’d be her own undoing, if only a small victory in the eyes of Dawn.

“And lastly,” Katherine took a breath, now having a much firmer look, “We need to talk about all those bad words you’ve been using, Dawn.”

She rolled her eyes in response. “Yeah, whatever, cry me a--”

“I’m not joking about this, Dawn.” Katherine cut in with a stern look. “We’ve given you plenty of reminders to behave yourself and you’re still saying all those naughty words.”

“Yeah, well, sorry if I feel the need to express myself everytime you and James make everything so difficult for me.” Dawn spat right back, even if she did feel intimidated.

“And there are mature ways of expressing yourself when we feel big emotions, and saying bad words and mean things are the farthest thing from it. I’m done hearing backtalk and bad words, do you understand me?” Ironic. She wanted Dawn to understand *her*? Would it be too cheesy to give her the classic, “You scratch my back, I scratch yours?” Respect begets respect, yet Amazons apparently didn’t see it that way. They commanded and demanded, then gave back breadcrumbs as they saw fit.

Then came the dreaded pose. The posture of aristocracy. The hands on her hips.

Dawn gave her a mean look as she didn’t readily respond. Fuck her. She was entitled to all the words she wanted to use, whenever she wanted to use them. Respect is earned, not demanded. More importantly, what pissed her off even more was being accused of “backtalk”. A

pseudoword that was all fluff for parents and adults to use against a child when they simply didn't want to hear a thing of what they had to say. No matter the reasoning, the argument, the logical facts or knowledge said from their mouths, disagreement meant opposition, and opposition meant being combative, and combativeness was inexcusable and unacceptable. Backtalk, and all Dawn's troubles and woes were being downgraded to just that.

Dawn's eyebrows quivered, but she took her final stand. "W-well...I'm entitled to say whatever I--"

Wrong answer. "No. We're not discussing this." Katherine sighed as she stepped forward. Dawn stumbled back, but before she could hit the floor with her padded rump, Katherine already had her in the air.

"W-wait, Katherine! What are you doing? I wasn't backtalking you! I'm an adult! I have the right to--"

Simply because she was larger, talking over Dawn was like breathing, or more accurately, just speaking normally. "And you had a choice to make a big-girl decision, and you chose not to. So, now you can think about what you'd like to say to me after your timeout."

She was gently dropped back onto the stool, reacquainted with the corner of the kitchen. She'd been handled so swiftly and shut down so smoothly. Once more, she was made out to be some intolerable, indignant child. It wasn't fair. It wasn't fair!

"Why don't *you* act like an adult and just *talk* to me!" Dawn spun on the stool, sitting on her knees, but almost immediately a pair of hands on her shoulders spun her back around, going as far as to tug up the back of her diaper, whether it was a subtle reminder or a doting observation that her underwear simply needed to be adjusted.

"We will talk after your timeout," Katherine doubled down. No more friendliness. "I said we could pick out your bed together, didn't I?" Right, which was enough reparations for all the mud she'd been dragged through. "Would you rather I just picked for you?" She asked threateningly, like any mother would.

But it hardly made Dawn flinch. It merely agitated her. Katherine was holding a petty threat over her head, thinking Dawn actually cared what kind of crib she got. It didn't matter if they were all cribs to begin with.

"Whatever." Dawn scoffed from the corner, deciding to turn things on its head. "Fine. Be the big baby. If you don't wanna talk because you know I'm right, then that's on you." Maybe if she at

least acted like she had the high ground it could at least leave a bitter taste in the Amazon's mouth.

But if her words had any effect, they sure didn't show. "I'm going to set the timer, and once it goes off I'll let you out from the corner. After that we're going straight to the store. Do *not* let me catch you leaving that stool. Got it?"

"Sure. Baby." Dawn tried to say it as condescendingly as she could, despite being the one in a diaper, quite unfortunately. Maybe she had poked the bear enough though, which is why she didn't plan on getting up from the stool. Maybe that was the secret. A timeout didn't mean anything as long as she didn't think of it as such. Just pretending to follow the whims of an Amazon who thought they had "won", that they bested the naughty Little. If it was all an act, the feelings associated with it were so too.

Feeling much more zen, like she'd finally beaten the game, Dawn stayed calm as she heard the mechanical whir of a small timer.

Tick-tick-tick-tick

Tick-tick-tick-tick

But God, was that noise awful. Just the right level of noise and ticking so incessantly that it was practically impossible to ignore. How long had Katherine even set it for? Whatever. Just ignore it and it'll all be over soon...

Tick-tick-tick

Tick-tick-tick...

This had to be insanity.

Maybe it was just a rough morning. No, it most certainly was a rough morning. A rough fucking week, but Dawn was trying to equate her mild torture to solitary confinement as her entire world right then consisted of a point where two blank walls met, accompanied by the wonderfully bland tune of a ticking timer on repeat.

She didn't need this. Dawn didn't do timeouts. Dawn, the grown adult, didn't take punishments like she was some child.

She was above this. This was beneath her.

She didn't leave the stool. Instead she clutched her fists, trying not to cry, lamenting over what she'd become in such a short amount of time. As mutilated as she'd been and poisoned by all those who simply want to see her fail, what kept her alive was hope. Hope that there will be an end to all of this. A way back home. Surely.

The metal jingle of a dog tag and canine nails lightly scraping the floor was from behind.

She had no eyes in the back of her head, but Waver wasn't exactly hard to hear. Nor was he to feel, as warm dog breath exhaling from his wet snout moved against Dawn's exposed lower back.

"Waver. No," an omnipotent Amazon called.

The dog's breath pulled away as Dawn felt his head turn, then eventually walk away. Dawn's corner-glued face scrunched up in annoyance. No, she didn't want a dog bigger than herself breathing down her back; she wanted absolutely nothing to do with Katherine, especially not to be seen like this...

"...Do you think you could handle coming from timeout a little early?" A sudden olive branch was extended, though by the devil herself.

"And miss out on hearing the timer tick forever?" It was meant to sound snarky and sarcastic, but emotion had become such a delicacy that she couldn't afford to spare it on useless exchanges like this one.

"Dawn...please, I'm trying to work with you?"

"Really? Could have fooled me." It was like the first fifteen minutes with the timer never even happened. Hell, she could rock to the tune of ticking all night long. That bench was cozier than she thought, even.

"Is this going to be how you act when we go shopping?"

"Depends on what you buy." Whatever Katherine was going to get was what she was going to get. It twisted Dawn's heart so uncomfortably even thinking about what that might mean, but that didn't mean she was going to be happy about it.

With an audible huff, Dawn could hear Katherine moving deeper into the kitchen. The ticking that just kept on ticking ticked a whirl faster as time moved forward at a blinding speed with the forced turn of the dial.

DIING!

Dawn was a smart girl. She wouldn't call it release on good behavior, but her time as a legitimate child told her that a ding meant the time for the crime had been served. Slowly she turned from her stool. Not her stool. *The* stool.

Katherine was upset. She carried a mug that wanted to be angry, wanted to be stern, but she was simply upset. Confused. Worried.

"I need you to be on your best behavior when we go out, okay...?"

Her best behavior. Like Katherine had the right to expect or demand anything of a person she'd already taken so much from. Definitely not. If Katherine wasn't going to truly empathize, then Dawn wasn't going to give her anything. Not anymore than she already had.

"Why should I? You just think I'm some brat, don't you? Might as well play into your stupid fantasy by being the troublemaker you want! Right, isn't that it?"

"You're...not being a brat," Katherine carefully said. Dawn nearly laughed with a haughty grin. It was plain as day, Katherine most certainly was thinking that. She was just trying to feign what so obviously contradicted her nature. It was like Katherine was the open book. She took a second, more than likely trying to find all the right words that danced around whatever landmines she thought might set Dawn off. That was the beautiful part. By this point, Katherine simply talking was enough to set the girl off. "You're upset about all these big things happening; it's a lot of change and a lot to take in... It feels like stuff isn't going your way, but this is when trust goes a very, very long way, Dawn."

"I have trusted you and James." Christ, hearing the mere mention of the word from her mouth angered her to no end. "You're both nothing but liars and cons."

"We'd never lie to you, swee--!"

"DON'T *EVEN!*"

A line. A fucking line. Big, red, clear as day and as visible as a white on black, and Katherine had waltzed right over it without a second thought.

“Do *NOT* tell me you aren’t a liar!” Dawn was seething. “*You.*” She pointed her finger at the confused Amazon. “You do *not* get to tell me that...! You’re the biggest, fattest, cruelest liar I’ve EVER seen!”

“Dawn...what are you talking about?”

Dawn looked back up at the Amazon who was giving her some pitying look, like she always did, like whenever she seemed to be so disconnected from Dawn’s line of thought that it was unintelligible babbles from a toddler. “Just...just what kind of idiot do you think I am?”

A low hanging fruit for an Amazon when they saw a troubled Little. “You’re not an idiot! Don’t say that!”

“HEATHER!”

Katherine didn’t respond, not readily. She blinked, confused. Of course. She had already forgotten. After all, Heather never mattered to her to begin with.

“Heather...? What about--”

“See?!” Dawn laughed, the writing on the wall was far too obvious. “*Heather!* Remember? That Little from my tour group? The one you oh-so *absolutely* fell in love with? The one you wanted to adopt, right?” Do it. Take the bait. Try and pretend. She wanted more than anything for this ignorant Amazon to take the bait and dig her hole even deeper.

But she didn’t. She didn’t say anything. Her face said many things, but not many sounds came from it. Yet her look was almost priceless.

Stunned. Shocked.

Finally, a victory. Dawn’s tone and anger said more than enough to the Amazon. There was a silent understanding. One knew that the other knew, and now that was known by both women.

“D...” Yes! Her brows came together as she looked torn and tried. “Don’t be angry with James...please...”

The muscles in her face spasmed. Not even an apology. Not a direct admission, either. Instantly, it was damage control for someone just as guilty.

“Yeah, well James is on a different list for plenty of other things he’s done. You’re the worst. The absolute worst.” This must have been what euphoria felt like. True euphoria; the kind that could only ever come after hitting the most extreme low in your life. Let the pain and problems heighten the taste of sweet satisfaction once it did finally come.

Katherine sniffled as she wiped a dry eye. “Y-yes... I wanted to adopt you... I wanted to give you a fun day...buy you nice clothes, take you out to lunch... I wanted you to have fun, and I wanted you to forget about all those scary feelings...!”

As Katherine verged onto tears, it was so validating, so wonderful by how so little Dawn could feel any empathy. She’d finally stuck her with a knife and was enjoying every tiny twist of the blade. “Just so you’d feel better about yourself when you kidnapped me?” And justify her heinous, deplorable actions?

“No!” Katherine stressed with heavy emotion. “No...! I...I wanted you to enjoy yourself. I wanted you to like us! I didn’t want any of this to happen to you!” Her eyes were finally starting to become glossy. Good. Dawn wanted her to feel what she felt, even if it was only a small fraction of it. “It hurts me...! It hurts me so much just from thinking about how hard it must be for you...! If I could, I would give anything to send you back home right this minute, Dawn, because I know how important it is to you. But I can’t...! I can’t do that because it’s not realistic...!”

Reality. Nothing about anything she’d experienced in the past 48 hours felt even remotely close to reality.

She wiped her eyes as she sniffled. “When James took you back to the hotel yesterday, I gave up. After seeing you so angry, I gave up on trying to ask you... We were never going to force you to stay with us... I know it hurts, and it feels like we betrayed you because we weren’t upfront, but I would never...! Please, Dawn, I want to be your shoulder to cry on!” She sniffled and wept. “I-I want you to tell me when you’re upset, or feeling sad... I don’t want to fight with you; I want to help you solve your problems...!”

“And I want you to treat me like my actual age.” Dawn laid another one into her. She herself was still quite angry, but she’d become more quiet as the Amazon poured herself out.

“I’m treating you the best way I know how; the best way that’s going to keep you safe.” Katherine gave her non-answer. “But Dawn...I know how much you want to go back, and I will do my best to help you get there...but...”

But what. What exception could there possibly be? How could this woman who claimed to be some fucking saint contradict her “holy” mission?

“Even with everything that’s happened...even if you hate me, and hate James, and hate everything about this place...! I still want you to stay with us.”

Dawn didn’t have the heart. Or, she didn’t have the will, the emotion to fight such an impossible, ignorant view.

“What your life was back in your dimension...” Katherine’s face scrunched as the thoughts of Dawn living her normal, ideal, preferred life was like poison in her veins. “You’re *better* here! It’s *safer*! I want to care for you more than anything; I want to keep you from all the things in life that make you upset, worried, sad, afraid, and scared. I only want to make you smile, laugh, and happy...!” She sobbed the more she pleaded, and Dawn felt herself crack the more she stared down the oxymorons thrown at her like baseballs straight into her gut.

The thing that caused her the most pain only wished to give her pleasure. The irony could write itself.

“And...and what...? You just think that I’d want that? That I’d want to be some stupid, mindless baby for you and your husband for the rest of my life? Like my dreams, aspirations and wishes don’t matter?”

“They *do* matter!” Katherine cried. “They do...! But...seeing you cry so much...get so angry...so stressed... Do you know how that makes me feel? Just thinking about leaving you all alone and letting you go on your own?”

“That’s not your place to say *anything*! Don’t force whatever fantasy you have on me!”

“I want you more than anything, Dawn, and nothing is going to change that.” Katherine said with more tears, but there was a chilling amount of resolve with her words. “You...you think so much that you need to put on a big, strong act, but I just want you to stop it already...! I want you to stop trying to tackle all those big emotions on your own, I hate seeing you work yourself up!”

“STOP IT!” Dawn growled. “Stop talking about me like I’m some kid that can’t handle their own emotions! I can, and I’ve been handling it for almost my ENTIRE LIFE!”

“I can’t...!” Katherine rubbed her eyes. “I can’t do that... You mean too much to me to let you do this to yourself. I love you, Dawn, you’re too, too precious to be left alone!”

“Are you listening to yourself?! We’ve known each other for LESS THAN *TWO* DAYS!”

Yet the madness only continued to spiral as Katherine solemnly shook her head.

“It doesn’t matter...” She sniffled as she dried her tears. “As soon as I saw you, the second you bumped into the Little in front of you and you fell on your bottom... When you were asleep and so peaceful in my arms...” Yet as Dawn interpreted it, when she was drugged into a sleep and completely vulnerable. “I...I know it’s hard to understand, Dawn, but when I saw you and held you in my arms...I decided I would bear with anything; the tantrums, the tears, the naughtiness, as long as it meant you’d still be with me and James. I never thought about what I did as lying to you...I just didn’t want to scare you after just meeting each other.

“Right...” Dawn scoffed beyond her sheer disbelief. “Because after 24 hours we’re somehow intimate...”

This couldn’t be real. It was a whole new level of strangeness. It seemed that Amazons had cravings, like sweet teeth. Dawn had deduced that much, at least. Amazons ogled Littles here like discount chocolate offered as free samples. That was one thing. Katherine seemed to be the same foundation, only branching in her own twisted way. She was like a baby duckling imprinting on its mother, except the roles were reversed and it was the mommy imprinting on the baby (but not actually a baby). Unbelievable. Was it right to even call her emotions fickle? For Dawn’s own sanity, she wouldn’t even humor the idea in her head as [BLANK] at first sight. Definitely not. No fucking way.

The worst of it all was zero apologies. True to her word, Katherine had no shred of remorse or regret in her eyes. As emotional as she was, her decision came off as rock solid. She was an overbearing, emotional tyrant that put her needs before Dawn’s under the sickly guise of supposed selflessness. Doing this for Dawn’s sake. Doing that.

Her eyes widened once the Amazon sat on her knees, opening up her arms.

“Do you think we could make up...?”

“Y-you...you tried to *kidnap* me.” Hearing herself say that gave the poor girl a double take. Maybe there was some merit to that Amazon’s LPS complaint...

Katherine did flinch at the sound of the word, but she simply shook her head.

“We never did and never will. We were taking you out for the day.” Ah, yes, of course, Dawn’s mistake. Taking her where she didn’t want to go, and only stopping once Dawn was finally

kicking, screaming and tearing them apart with her words did they finally listen. It wasn't a faithful gesture. They were just terrible kidnappers.

And at the end of the day, this song and dance was far too overused. Whatever good intentions there might actually be, they'd long since been buried and sullied by their actions thus far. The only idiot and ignorant fool was Dawn for thinking anything might change. "No. I don't want to make up. I want to go home. Tell yourself whatever you want, I don't care." She noticed the slight twitch in Katherine's open arms, dropping just slightly to the sound of Dawn's outright and unremorsefully harsh rejection.

Dawn had been through her own spiral of emotions so much, she finally reached a place in her mind where she could just say how it was. No need to yell, scream, or cry. Simply speak her mind.

"You and James aren't going to let me leave. You're kidnapping me. You're holding me here against my will. But that's whatever I guess. You've made it clear that you really don't care what I think, whatever you say to make yourself feel better and think otherwise."

She had half a mind to compliment the woman just for letting her talk. But deep down, even Dawn suspected the silence came from all the blows she was dealing to the woman. If the Amazon truly cared about her, surely she was feeling the pain from what it felt like to be absolutely despised by someone you have feelings for.

"I guess I'm done trying to appeal to you, Katherine. I've tried it with you and James. Time and time again, but it never changes. But it's whatever, I guess." An honest to goodness sigh of tiredness left her mouth. "I hate you." It felt so good to say. "I hate you and James so much. I wish you two never saved me. I wish I was kidnapped by that other woman who was at least kinder than you two. She had the decency to not to pretend like my opinion mattered. At least I knew what I was getting with her."

Good. Tears. Now Katherine was crying. Maybe Dawn was starting to become a sadist, lest she start to drink the Amazon's misfortune too.

But Dawn outwardly sighed once more, like it was all some inevitable spat in the workplace. Something that simply needed to be endured and dealt with. "I'll stay though. Not like I have a choice. But if you really do care about me. If anything about me actually matters to you? Please, stop telling yourself that what you're doing is kind. You don't have my best interest at heart. You only care about what you want and it's been like that from the start. I can't resist you if you decide to turn me into your doll, but I don't want you acting like I made the decision for myself."

Katherine quietly listened, as much as she could through her tears and sniffing.

It didn't elicit an emotional response from Dawn though. "I'm gonna go wait in the living room now, assuming we're still going out." Naturally she did not want to go by any means, yet that much like everything else as of late was out of her hands.

Without another thought, Dawn calmly walked across the kitchen, right by the sobbing Amazon.

"Oh, and Katherine?" Dawn's head still hung by the doorway. "Truly, deep down in my heart: fuck you."