

9 - The Hotel Room

Stacy stared at Dawn for as long as each syllable of the Amazon's grim sentence sunk into her consciousness.

What was she supposed to say in response? Did she even hear her properly? Dawn remained quiet yet her pupils were dilating as her panicked mind was at a total loss of how to communicate with her body.

Stacy finally gave the Little some distance though as she huffed and puffed, crossing her arms.

“Do you have *any* idea just how much trouble you've caused me?” Stacy asked in a much plainer voice. Dawn was still at a complete loss, which in some way visibly irked Stacy. She clicked her tongue as she stood from the bed.

“I have spent this entire week taking care of all you Littles. I make sure to keep you all accounted for, I take you to your rooms, I take you on tours, I help you cross the street, remind you to use the potty...!” She sighed, continuing her rant to a petrified girl.

“You see, munchkin,” she said, sounding far less sweet than the pet name implied, “I fill a quota for each and every tour. It's important that for every odd sum of you Portal Littles that a few 'happen' to go missing. Does that make sense to you?”

Dawn had no words. She knew Amazons were less than stellar people, and certainly Stacy had far less merit than even the disappointments like James and Katherine, but this was a new low. A new terror and fear that somehow existed beyond what unsightly persona she already had.

“When I was told you'd been taken I marked you off, thinking that was that. Yet here I was, thinking you'd been adopted by a proper Amazon, not some kind of unicorn that lets you go.” Her eye just barely twitched, as if to visibly indicate her disbelief. “You were in a pull-up!” She exclaimed, postulating that the science most certainly did not agree with the outcome. “Honestly...” She groaned tiredly as she paced, “In the past three years, nothing like this has ever happened before...!”

Dawn nervously watched her, trying to think of a way to speak or somehow poise her response or question in a way to avoid setting her off. The atmosphere was downright unnerving. Finally. She'd found it. Rock bottom. A scenario so bad and so inescapable that she'd crack her nails just trying to scrape past this bedrockian demise. Her last bastion that already was a burning siege had collapsed entirely as Stacy herself seemed to reveal her ulterior motive. What made Dawn's throat hot and tingly with bile though was her nonchalant attitude.

Stacy walked to and fro as if it really was a simple workplace blunder; robbing a person of their belongings and alienating them in a foreign dimension. Where was her humanity?

She left a few fingers on her chin as her gaze focused on the nonmaterial. “*Portal Customs is likely voiding her papers as we speak...*” Stacy muttered under her breath, yet not enough to at least give Dawn more cause for concern.

“A-ah...I-I’m sorry!” Dawn blurted out, barely even recognizing her own words. Her hurried pleas felt off the cuff, yet the farthest thing from her rational mind. “I-I...I didn’t mean to cause you any trouble! P-please! Let me go home! I promise I won’t tell anybody! Please!” And tears rolled down her cheeks, without any kind of alternative that could so much as spark in her brain. Forget the anger, the distrust that stunk so heavily from this Amazon’s craftiness and malicious intent. Even if Dawn was a mark for her personal agenda, it seemed to matter so little when she was the very key to getting home.

Stacy turned her head at that. “Sorry? If you were sorry, honey, you’d be marching that bottom out of this hotel to find someone else that’ll adopt you.” She paused to let the suggestion set in. “Well?” She left a hand on her hip, coincidentally leaving herself out of the way between Dawn’s line of vision and the door.

It was easy to infer by what she meant, yet naturally it was absolutely out of the question for Dawn. But because she absolutely wouldn’t throw herself to the wolves, and by consequence could not “apologize”, she sniffled as it meant further upsetting Stacy, the one person she desperately needed to stay on the good side of.

“P-please, th-there’s...let me do something else! I...I gotta go--”

“Why do you even want to go back?!” Stacy whined, seeming to find Dawn’s wishes simply outrageous. “Terra is hardly the kind of society ours is? Our technology is better, less carbon emissions, better education...it’s undeniably better to stay here! You remember all the tours, right?”

Dawn hiccuped. She didn’t want to reason. She didn’t want to debate. She just wanted her things back, yet Stacy rambled like Dawn was an inconsolable child she could only talk at, not listen to.

Stacy gave her an annoyed look, finally devoid of the cheery, cushy tone she’d given the past week, as if she finally ran out of fuel for pleasantries. “I’ll make it easy for you. I want you gone. I don’t care how you do it, but to me you’re just another Little needing to be put in their place.”

“Wh-what?” Dawn stuttered on eggshells. “I-I’ll be gone! To-tomorrow! Please, please! I’ll go back to my dimension and I’ll never tell anybody!” She sobbed as she begged. “I-I don’t even need my luggage back! J-just give me my visa, my passport...!”

Stacy came in very close, leaning her face in, leaving a mere few inches between hers and Dawn’s.

“Even *if* I gave them back to you, they would be absolutely no good, honey.” The finality seemed to have restored some glow to Stacy’s face, in exchange for sapping the rest of it from Dawn’s. She sighed with a smile. “I won’t go into much detail, since it’s not an easy subject for a Little to handle, but when people like me add our chicks to the ‘quota’,” she said with added enunciation, “the people that I work for talk to some more important people, and they let other people know back in your dimension that you’ve returned safe and sound!”

It wasn’t complicated. But it was, hence Dawn’s teary confused look. Returned? She’s far from anything close to being returned.

“B-but I haven’t gone back...?”

It was like honey to the Amazon’s ears. Her smile drifted farther from her once agitated expression. “No, that’s right, you haven’t.” Stacy nodded, easing back into her patronizing tone. “But the people in charge of the portals say you have! That means if anyone looks for you, the *very* last place you were seen was coming back from this dimension!” She explained with softened enthusiasm. “From there, a few more people extend your footprint back home a little bit to muddy the waters... But really, telling you anything at all is already far beyond what you need to know...”

Disappeared. Stacy was right. The explanation was near unfathomable.

“Wh...why...?” It was the only question. It could amount to so much in return, yet a gut feeling from Dawn told her that there would be meager crumbs of explanation. What was this already? Conspiracy? Collusion among officials between both dimensions?

Stacy gave Dawn a distasteful frown. “I really don’t think any more explanation is all that necessary... At the end of the day though, you’re good for this dimension, and in exchange you get a better life here. Win-win, right?”

It wasn’t a win. It was so, so far from it. But Dawn didn’t argue the semantics, not when it was an accessory to a life-changing misfortune.

“And before you ask anything else, if you’re wondering why we’re even having this conversation, it’s so we don’t have to deal with any misunderstandings for tomorrow,” Stacy grinned, “After all, I can’t have a native Little getting on a bus meant for Portal Littles?”

Dawn whimpered at that, gritting her teeth. She wanted to refute and argue, but what proof did she have?

“Really, though, staying with that Amazon insane enough to actually let a Little go probably would have been in your best interest.” Stacy chuckled. “Have fun trying to find a golden goose like that again!”

Another crushing blow. Dawn wouldn’t exactly consider James and Katherine ideal if she were to legitimately be stranded in this dimension, yet they did have their edge over some of the other deranged Amazons she’d seen this past week, including the very one that came very close to successfully kidnapping her this morning.

And with each strike, Stacy seemed to be finding her stride once again. “Oh well! Again, I only took you back in the lobby because it’d be better to avoid any confusion. It’s not the tightest-lipped secret as to what goes on, but no questions are better than any at all, right?” Stacy seemed to give a genuine smile, which only hurt Dawn more. “So, to make it clear, once I leave this room, we do not know each other.” Stacy said as she sat back down on the bed.

“To me you’re nothing more than a silly Little spouting stories. If I see you in that lobby tomorrow when all the other chicklings are going home, I will not hesitate to flag you as a lost Little in need of protective services, understood?” And her inviting stare was anything but compassionate. Menacing, cold and laced with venom. It was an outright threat.

Dawn slowly nodded. What else was there to do at this point.

Stacy sighed with relief, seeing that the last nail had finally been hammered into place. “Good, as long as you understand, you’re free to do as you please!” She paused to admire the imaginary roses. “Well, actually, I would call it more like going out on your own terms...” And with little left to the imagination, Stacy did not hesitate with a quick hand on Dawn’s pants and yanking them off completely.

“H-hey!” Dawn cried, reaching out for what was so high away, stripped of her last set of pants. They were designed for toddlers, yet it was a shred of dignity more than complete nakedness.

“No underwear underneath?” Stacy mockingly commented. “Last time I checked, you were in a pull-up...” She stood up from the bed, folding the small pair of pants and holding firmly onto

them. “You’re free to do as you please, Dawn, but I need to make sure you at least land where you’re supposed to. No Amazon in their right mind will let a half-naked Little walk out of a place like this in anything less than a diaper, barring any weirdo Amazons like from this morning... But, lightning never strikes twice! And by that point it’ll mean you’ve been claimed, which is in both of our best interests.”

She’d certainly put Dawn in a tough spot. She was a mouse in an empty field, stalked from above by countless hawks. A pantless Little screamed immaturity and checked every box to put her in her place.

“So...well...” Stacy looked around the room as if she’d misplaced something. “I think that’s everything on my end?” She gave Dawn a quizzical look as if she were fishing for a similar response. “Worst case scenario, the maids will find you tomorrow past checkout time and deal with you then. Either way, you’re not my problem anymore.” Stacy turned on her heel and went for the door.

Dawn was silent. Mute. Broken. She could call Stacy back and try to plead for some kind of chance, yet by the way the Amazon put it, things seemed to be out of her hands. Even still, that didn’t stop her from rubbing it in.

With a wave of her fingers Stacy grinned from the doorway. “Toodaloo, baby-boo~!” Stacy cooed as she closed the door. She was gone. Dawn’s pants were gone.

Her luggage was gone. Her phone. Her passport. Her visa. Her identity. Her dignity. Her modesty. Her sanity. Her livelihood. Her safety. Her boyfriend. Her family. Her home. Her dimension. Her everything.

Dawn tried to stand, but even she didn’t know what for. It felt governed by instinct at this point. But she fell right back over. Either the strength had left her or she’d realized just what a fruitless endeavor it would be. She could kick, scream, cry, shout, but none of it mattered when her sphere of influence had already been locked in a box sealed from the outside.

This was it. She’d finally arrived.

The void.

The next hour led her into the late of night, leaving her legs tired as she shakily stood on an overturned plastic bin that was balanced atop a steady foot-stool. Between her crying fits she

peered through the peephole to her door, watching through the fish-eye lens view an exaggerated view of the hallway.

What seeds of hope she had left were mere figments of imagination by this point, yet Dawn hinged onto what small items could even still be conceived. Each and every time there was a passing face, Dawn would flinch and nearly fall off her sloppy tower at the sight of some grotesque Amazon. Fear didn't even describe it anymore. It was absolute terror now.

Dawn stood, naked from the waist down as there was a slight chill on her bare bottom. It was the equivalent of gushing blood in shark-infested waters. Seeing the many giants pass through sent her imagination to haywire levels, petrified by what they would most certainly do if they found Dawn right then in the state that she was.

But she wasn't peering through the peephole just to shave years off her lifespan, but instead to find the one other kind of person she might be able to get through to.

A fellow Little. She likely had other comrades on this floor, but the hardest and most difficult bar to clear for that to happen was sheer luck. To catch a Little walking in the hall seemed next to impossible the more she thought about it, which is why she tried not to.

It was a hotel that serviced Littles, but only through cheap adaptations. Everything was Amazon-sized, including the door to every room, so why bother walking through a hotel that's a physical exercise for you to navigate? What's more, every other Little from Earth was likely packing their bags. That alone made Dawn uneasy. Everyone but her would be going home. Going home without her unless she could have one thing go right tonight. It was late, even less reason to see a Little out and about, and limited by her peephole, given she couldn't go out there half-naked, just about every card in the deck was against her.

Failure was approximately guaranteed, and even Dawn in her most rational state would consider this all to be a pointless, tiresome endeavor. She was on the cusp of single digit hours from being between now and when Stacy and the others would leave on the bus. She wouldn't be on that bus and she wouldn't be going through the portal home.

Instead, she'd be waiting in this room, hiding from the maids that would inevitably find her, diaper her and send her off to who in the hell knows where. Did they have places like orphanages for Littles here? Dear God, she did not want to think about it. Her mind was in a crossfire of trying to pray and think of some means of escape, while also being attacked by her own morbid imagination of simply how much worse things will become.

Her stomach growled as she tried not to squirm. She hadn't eaten all day, and despite being in a hotel with room service, there was hardly a chance of making use of it. It went without saying that the risk was far too high in having someone deliver food to her room, lest the Amazon employee do something to her right then and there. She was exhausted, hungry and worried. She knew that she needed to keep fighting, as futile as it felt, but her body was reaching another hard stop.

And in the midst of her hunger pains and obscured view, she caught a glance of a small passing brown head of hair. The head had come and gone by the time Dawn fully processed it, lagged by her body's withdrawal. But when it did hit she scrambled to get off the bin that was on the stool, toppling over entirely as she fell on her side onto the floor. Her one small fortune was not falling on the wrist that she'd already done something to from earlier. It hurt, but what hurt so much more was thinking of a fate that left her trapped in a dimension as demented as this.

Dawn stood with a burst of energy as she tried to ignore the pain, hopping off the ground to jump to grasp the handle to the door and swing it open. Gluing her lower half to the inside of the door, she leaned her head out into the hall to catch the distant figure.

"H-hey...!" Dawn started in a half-whisper, pleading for the stranger's attention. They were short. No, not short. They were Dawn's size. Normal sized. But small they were as was their range of hearing, because Dawn's voice had gone unheard.

"H-hey!" Dawn said louder this time, bleeding with desperation. Modesty was a forgotten practice in the face of extreme duress.

And for once her prayers had been answered. The person stopped and turned their head with a quizzical look.

Both Dawn and the stranger exchanged looks of surprise.

"D-Dawn?"

"Hea...Heather!" Dawn shouted, overtaken by a wave of emotion. She nearly ran out into the hall to meet her, yet was frozen still by the draft on her bare skin.

Heather fully turned around this time to walk back to Dawn, slowly transitioning into a small jog.

"Dawn!" Heather exclaimed again with a wide smile. She had a small laugh of disbelief, as if she couldn't believe her eyes. "Y-you're okay!" She exclaimed, stopping right in front of the door.

Dawn only offered a meek smile in return. “Y-yea....mm...” She started to reciprocate, but quickly lost the joy in her voice as it couldn’t have been farther from the truth. She hadn’t been any more okay since this morning. She’d simply found a new danger to be snatched by.

“How?” Heather asked. “I-I...I ran to tell Stacy as soon as it happened this morning, but...she said not to worry about it...” The look on her face now shifted to one of gloom. But it lit up again as she said, “I can’t believe you escaped...! I’m so happy for you!”

“H-Heather, I...” Dawn started, choking on her tears. It was a wild mix of emotions that she was feeling. Heather *had* tried to do something. She did try to get her help this morning. She did the only thing she could do was tell an Amazon. It wasn’t her fault that it happened to be Stacy, a woman who very much counted on Dawn’s disappearance. Heather was a good person, and this entire time Dawn had been talking herself into having animosity and speculating the worst. What’s more? She was planning to put a friend into a position where she might be adopted against her will. It was all a sham in the end, yet it didn’t change Dawn’s intentions despite her cruel assumptions.

“What’s wrong?” Heather tilted her head, stepping closer to the door. “You’re back now, okay? We’ll all be getting out of this freaky place tomorrow. You need to tell me how you escaped!”

Dawn sniffled with an ugly cry as she shook her head, drowning in irony.

“A-a-ahm...I’m n-not sure if I can go home...!” Dawn sobbed.

“What?” Heather asked. “Why not? We’re all leaving tomorrow...Here, let me come in?” Heather came closer to the door.

Dawn wanted to give words of caution, or try to prepare Heather for the objective weirdness regarding her state of dress, yet she stayed teary-eyed and silent as she did let the woman in.

“Let’s just sit and...” Heather quieted down as she walked in, turning to see Dawn’s naked lower half. “Dawn...?”

The room still looked a bit out of order. The trash bin Dawn was standing on laid on the floor on its side, the closet and dresser drawers were still haphazardly open from Dawn’s fruitless search for her luggage, and the bed was still ruffled and wrinkled by her sleep and Stacy’s visit.

Heather quickly averted her gaze, turning back to the hall. “Uhm, how about I wait while you get dressed? Sorr--”

“No!” Dawn spoke with pure, instinctual desperation as she grasped Heather’s wrist. Even if she looked deranged and nearing her last mental brace, and even if it wasn’t just how she looked, but how she truly felt, the suggestion alone of Heather showing a sliver of leaving now would shatter Dawn’s hopes into smithereens. Heather in this moment had become nothing less than Dawn’s very lifeline. “You can’t leave me! Please stay; I-I need help and I don’t know what to do! I’m scared...!” Her voice started to quiver as its pitch heightened with her heartbeat.

Her hysterics seemed to be telling as they were off-putting, it seemed.

“O...Okay, Dawn,” Heather gave her a seemingly stand-offish look. “Look,” she softened her expression, “I promise I’ll stay, but let me wait out in the hall while you get dressed?” She started turning, but Dawn held onto her wrist, tugging back firmly.

“You don’t get it!” Dawn sobbed. “I don’t have any clothes...! I don’t have anything!”

“...What?” Heather gave her a full look of confusion after the words hit in full effect.
“You...already packed them?”

“Noo!” Dawn whined, finding with each misunderstanding that more explanation was required. “I don’t have any of my clothes! I don’t have my phone, my ID, my passport, my visa...!” She started to work herself up more and more with each confession and truly started to emulate a toddler’s meltdown, only it was with serious and damning cause.

Now Heather was raising an eyebrow, but she didn’t tug away. It seemed that she was beyond the point of total misunderstanding as she stepped farther away from the exit, though closing the door behind her. It was enough to loosen Dawn’s tension if by a little as her arms fell at her sides like clumps of mud.

“Dawn, what happened to you?”

The look on Dawn’s face scrunched up with a question like that. Even she couldn’t confidently answer it. Today had warped her mind and transformed her in ways she couldn’t even imagine up until now, much less draw a line from start to finish. She remembered the events themselves. Vividly. But, to consider how they made her feel and to make her so vulnerable to reach this point...it seemed impossible.

She wiped a tear from her eye. “I’ll explain, but please...please don’t leave...”

Heather nodded her head, walking deeper inside the room, passively observing the state of it.

She turned her head back while near the bed. “Is it all right if I sit up here?”

Dawn nodded in response, beside herself with a hand clutching her other arm. She did squeeze her legs together somewhat to give herself some sense of modesty, yet it’d been violated so many times today, it felt pathetic to think that she was already slightly numb to the embarrassment.

Heather via the Little stool climbed onto the bed, sitting along its edge as she shuffled a bit to the side to make room for Dawn. And finally being a bit more conscious of herself, Dawn took the opposite end closer to the headboard where she could slip her lower half beneath the comforter.

Dawn didn’t wait for Heather to prod first. “When I was kidnapped this morning on the sidewalk...” She felt physically ill just from trying to recall that hefty Amazon, “that Amazon took my pants and underwear, but I also had my phone then...”

“But how did you get away?” Heather asked, which would be the inevitable bridge from Dawn’s story.

“...I didn’t. Two different Amazons stopped her apparently. I was drugged.” Dawn spoke with a disgusted voice. Amongst everything that happened today, she’d never felt so violated. “Those two saved me from her and spent the day getting me new pants,” she opted to ignore the point on pull-ups.

“Then why are you here now?” Heather, once again, asked in advance what would presumably be Dawn’s next explanation.

“A...a lot happened when I was with them,” she kept it extremely brief, “but they brought me back here. It was starting to look like they were gonna kidnap me though...” If it wasn’t known by now, her opinion on the matter was a flurry of anger and unease. If it were to be equated to a near-death experience, Dawn was still trying to find her grasp on what was still tangible and stable. Naked and afraid, that meant she had little to recognize.

Heather continued to be an interjection at every point. “So that doesn’t explain your luggage and stuff, though?”

Just for a moment, Dawn’s nervousness and fear managed to subside for her to feel a tinge of annoyance by Heather’s listening ability, or rather her patience. But only a moment, as Dawn doubled down back on the severity of her situation.

Now for the bombshell. “Stacy took them.” Dawn said, letting the heavy words drop before her open mouth.

“Stacy did?” Heather asked rhetorically. “Why?”

“Because of this morning...” To think that one of her most unexpected feelings right now would be regret. Naturally she needed to reach this point to even have a chance of going home, yet she started to imagine herself the fool for working so hard to get back to a place that had long left her behind. “Stacy is just like every other Amazon. She just wants us to ‘disappear’ and wind up being stuck in this God awful dimension!”

The accusation left Heather with a slightly stunned expression, looking unsure of how to proceed. “But...then why are there so many of us left? Wouldn’t we all be ‘missing’ by now?”

Even to Dawn that weak defense seemed ridiculous to even conceive. Heather wasn’t a college student, but to figure something like this shouldn’t take any critical thought... “It’s because it’s supposed to seem insignificant. If only a few people from an entire bunch go missing, it’s easier to cover up than losing the entire tour group, right?”

“I guess...” Heather said with a crease in her brow. “So Stacy wants you to ‘disappear’?”

Finally, having reached a meeting of minds Dawn nearly smiled if the matter weren’t so vile. “Yes! An hour ago Stacy came to my room and told me everything. She took my bag and all my stuff because she plans on making me stay here. She’s not letting me go back to Earth!” And as she went back into the meat of her explanation, she started to sound audibly more upset. “And finally, she took my fucking pants!” Dawn seethed, yet the ability to swear without a passive comment or direct punishment gave her a small sense of glee. Alternatively, it soured the sense of thinking her given rights as an adult were now privileges and not freedoms.

Heather left the silence for a bit before speaking. She wasn’t entirely quizzical anymore. “She took...everything?”

“Yes,” Dawn wiped a tear from her eye, “If I don’t have my passport and visa, I’ll never be able to go home!” As she said this, an even deeper pang of worry recalled Stacy saying that things were already in motion beyond her. What if somehow her visa were invalidated now, or she was specifically on a list to not be allowed travel, or was removed from one that was permitted? The possibilities for failure were endless, and a gaping void that if she stared too long into, would consume her entirely. “Please, Heather...I don’t know what to do! Please help me!”

Now Heather looked a bit disturbed. She shuffled a little on the bed, clearly uncomfortable with the story and thinking of its many details. “Did Stacy ever say anything about me?” She asked.

“What?” Dawn was caught off guard, expecting to focus on herself. “No, she didn’t. You’ll be fine! Heather, please! You’re the only person I have!” Dawn begged, praying dearly. She didn’t know a single other Little-- person, on this tour. Amazons were naturally out of the question, so that really left just Heather.

Heather seemed to look a bit more relieved, who took a small breath. “Dawn...I asked Stacy this morning to help you...? When you got taken...?” She was avoiding eye contact, looking around Dawn, or nowhere near entirely.

“Y-yeah...?” Dawn agreed, but what did that change? That was then. This is now!

Heather briefly scratched her cheek. “D-Dawn...I wanna go home, too...”

“Yeah, me too!” Dawn practically shouted. What was she even getting at?! Why couldn’t she give a straight answer? “I-I just need your help to think of something...something so I can maybe get my passport and stuff back... Please!” Why was she acting so strangely?

Heather still looked away. Straight ahead. “Look, I uhm...I really feel for you, but...” her answer started in the form of action, as she started to slip off the bed, onto the stool and to the floor.

“Wh-what?” Dawn’s voice cracked as Heather moved. “N-no, Heather, please...!”

“I wanna get to go home too, Dawn...” Heather turned her body to face Dawn, yet she rubbed her arm and looked to the floor. Sounding nervous and afraid, she said, “I want to help, but what am I supposed to do...?”

Like a punch to the gut, reality as twisted as it was gave Dawn an expectedly sick feeling. She still slipped out of the bed, having next to no concern for her lower modesty at a time like this. “H-Heather...” She even forced her hands into Heather’s, interlocking fingers as she tried to get her to look.

“It’s just...” Heather’s voice trailed as her fingers left the interspaces between Dawn’s. “What if she threw your stuff out already, or something...?”

“She didn’t! She said so! They’re probably in her room!” Dawn countered. Please, whatever it would take, if she could get Heather on her side, it’d feel like there was a modicum of a fighting chance left. “What if...what if we snuck in--”

“You want *me* to sneak into her room?” Heather interjected with a tone of disbelief. “Dawn, like...I get that you’re in trouble right now, but why should I have to risk my wellbeing, too?”

Dawn wordlessly stared at her. She was right. Heather had no obligation. Dawn was begging for her to jump into the shark infested waters with her, all for just maybe getting out, or otherwise giving the sharks two meals instead of one. But there was no comfort in objective reasoning. Dawn didn’t want a reason for why she shouldn’t get any help. It was a time to be selfish and desperate.

“Then...then could you just help me out? Be a look-out or something? Just while I--”

“What if she catches me, though?” Heather said, implying further risk for herself. “Dawn, look, I’m really sorry, but this is...--”

“How can you be fucking sorry if you’re not willing to do a *DAMN* thing to help me?!” Dawn angrily shouted. She sniffled as she wiped her glossy eyes. “Don’t you get it? If I can’t get my stuff back I’m *stuck here!* Stuck in this horrible, twisted dimension! Are...aren’t we friends?”

Some of her words and maybe attitude had caused an apparent shift in the atmosphere. Her next attempt had the exact opposite effect.

Heather gave her a look bordering on disgusted. “We...like, met just today?”

The further refusal made her wince as she tried other tactics. “I have a family! I have a mom, a dad, a boyfriend...I go to college!”

As incompatible Dawn was making herself with her hastening meltdown, Heather was clearly starting to look more and more uncomfortable. After all, what was there to say?

“L-look...I’m really sorry, Dawn, but I should probably go...”

“No!” Dawn’s gaze shot forward at that. “You can’t! Just...just please help me a little! Help me think of something! I can’t stay here, Heather!” Her last gleam of light was fading and her world was crumbling.

“I...uhm...I gotta finish packing...” Heather murmured, incidentally making a comment that stung more than it was supposed to.

Dawn stumbled and fell to her knees, practically groveling. “Then pants! Give me a pair of pants at least, please! If I walk outta here like this, somebody’s gonna catch me!”

“But...what if Stacy somehow finds out I gave you a pair?” Heather asked, sounding nervous. “What if she knows that we’re talking right now? I...no offense, Dawn, but I don’t wanna end up like you...”

Dawn grit her teeth. It had felt like this was destiny, so why, why did it end so poorly? Was it just to mock another attempt to save herself?

“...Ad-adopt you...! The...the Amazons who brought me back, th-they wanted to adopt you!” Dawn proclaimed, hitting her last-ditch effort.

This did stop Heather in her tracks. “Wh-what?”

A glimmer, if you could even call it that appeared in Dawn’s eye. “Y-yeah! The ones from this morning...who were talking about your ass? They’re the ones who rescued me! They brought me back because I agreed I’d let them meet you! But I didn’t! I tricked them! Because we’re friends!” Dawn gave her a trembling, inane smile with tears rolling down her cheeks. It wouldn’t have been a knowing lie had Dawn not spoken to James in the lobby. In other words, she was lying through her teeth. Anything to get help...

“...Did...*did* anybody even take you back here?” Heather asked, a sudden switch from awkward, distant sympathy to accusation and distrust. “I...I don’t even know if that’s true, Dawn. I really need to leave now...” And so, her “friend” had hurried to the door, blessed with just a few more inches to reach the handle on her toes than Dawn could.

The smile had faded, drooping into a frown as murmurs and emotional sputters escaped from her agape mouth. Dawn was a decrepit, sobbing and wailing mess as Heather opened the door back into the hall. Just over her cries she could hear a fleeting “Good luck,” and finally the shut of the door.

That was it. She had no cards left in the deck. No ace that ever existed, nor a plan B that was ever made. Heather, the final face to turn to had abandoned her, rathering she save herself than stick her neck out any further for someone she barely knew. The worst of it all was that Dawn could understand it. She could justify the action and in a different life likely do the same. But like her thought process before, she didn’t want to hush her tears or find an explanation as for why it was expected that she would have no help. She wanted a savior, not the reason for why it wouldn’t come.

Her stomach ached and her wrist complained just as much. She felt hot and frustrated despite wearing only her bare skin, and wanted nothing more than this all to be some terrible fever dream that would end in her waking up in her bed. At home, on Earth.

She quieted down a little, closing her eyes as she laid on the floor, staring up at a ceiling that felt three times too high for what was reality. Her chest rose and fell, slowing down the rate and increasing the quantity of air, breathing as she avoided yet another panic attack.

Then she opened them.

Nothing had changed. It was the same hotel room in the same dimension with the same half-naked girl victimized by it all. The idea of thought, movement or speech seemed like moving mountains by now. And so, Dawn continued to lay there. Her throat was dry and she was sore all over. Nothing left to do other than let the time pass.

The sun would never seem to rise on the endless night of misery, as Dawn had scarcely moved from her spot. She very well could have been the corpse to a crime scene awaiting its chalk outlining before being seen by the coroner.

She stopped caring about the passage of time and in that block of unknown minutes or hours lost, she hardly even considered how to better her truly hopeless situation. Whether she tried to climb out of it or just accept it, she'd fall just as deep all the same. A sinkhole didn't discriminate to its contents.

Maybe she could flood the bathroom, and consequently the entire hotel? Just leave the bath running... It hardly did much for herself, but at least it left the chance of stunting everyone else's chances of going home to the realm of her own deranged idea of possibility...

But then again, it probably wouldn't. Maybe the sick and twisted Amazons were smart enough to account for that; Littles playing with water. Maybe the bath had a sensor to prevent overflow, or a personal, hidden camera in the bathroom of every Little's room that kept them from mischief... By now, she was willing to believe in any outlandish thing that seemed to make it worse for herself, because that's all it had been thus far.

As dead inside as she felt, her heart nearly jumped out of her chest as soon as there was a knock on her door. Who could it have been? A debt collector for the pants she owed James and Katherine? Stacy back with another bottle of hand soap? Maybe hotel staff to tell her to check out early.

Whoever it was, it was most certainly the end for Dawn. An Amazon would refuse to leave as soon as they knew a Little was in here. No matter the initial reason they'd want to "check on her," or "make sure she has everything she needs," and she wouldn't. She wouldn't have pants, nor underwear, to which they'd be happy to rectify the latter with disposable underwear.

The discarded pull-up was still in the bathroom last time Dawn checked. Was it better to wear than nothing at all? Debatable, yet both equally as incriminating without anything to go over it. Hopeless, everything was...

There was another knock. She'd forgotten someone was there in the process of thinking about the person that might be there.

"Dawn?" A male's voice called from the other side. Receiving the voice with curiosity would have been a bit too much to say, yet Dawn had at least expected it to be a female that would bring her demise.

They knocked again. Dawn didn't scream. She didn't cry or wail. She merely thought to herself what a run it'd been. All the struggle and fuss just to end up in a place she'd always be, no matter the means.

So she sat up, standing and walking to the door. Figuring that they would get in regardless, whether by having Dawn let them in of her own accord or them finding a staff member to let them in, she went quietly. Finding the energy to hop off the ground, she lazily grasped the handle, slipping off of it, then jumping again for a better grasp.

Dejected was the best description for Dawn's expression. She was letting the burglar into her home and couldn't care less. Finally with purchase, partly dangling, she used the parts of her feet close enough to the ground to walk the door partly open before letting go.

She didn't bother covering up. She stood there in her half-naked splendor like it was a badge of pride. As prideful as someone so depressed could be, hands hanging by her sides.

Lightning struck twice.

It was easy to say that probably nothing by now could incite a reaction from Dawn that was anything but despair. Yet she now stood corrected.

"Do you...always answer the door like that?" James gave her a curious look, standing right before the Little who held a shocked expression on her face.

Dawn was wide-eyed. “James...?” She took a step back to make way, yet stumbled on her heel and fell on her bottom. She finally pressed her knees together as emotion flowed back into her brainstream.

“Would you prefer if I gave you a second to change...?” James asked before stepping in. He didn’t fully look away, but he kept his eyes up. While Dawn didn’t complain for a few reasons, she was still trying to drain her expectations that truly believed this confrontation to be the end of her adult, independent being.

Back on her feet, she started walking back to the bed, finally putting a hand on the crack of her backside. “N-no, it’s fine...come in. Why are you here? Isn’t it late?”

“Very late,” he shut the door on the way in. “Almost didn’t expect to find you.” Yet he did. But why did he.

Of all people, the last Dawn would expect to find on the other side of her door was James, maybe Katherine as a close second. After James’ confession from the lobby, Dawn was incredulous, but eventually seething. She wanted nothing to do with him nor Katherine ever again. Being toted around as a potential baby-to-be was plenty enough to burn the bridge between them, and Dawn made it explicitly clear. So despite all the cruel things she said to him, why was he here?

But before chasing that line of thought, a new worry crossed her mind. What if he was here to collect, screw the idea of consent and just outright take her? By now it didn’t take anything at all to know that it’d be pointless to try and resist.

“I get what this is.” Dawn said tiredly. Maybe it just wasn’t hitting her yet, or she stopped caring.

“You do?” James asked. “I guess that makes this faster, then. Just a second...” And as he mumbled and seemed to move around, Dawn merely laid in the bed, staring up at the ceiling. She tried to steel her heart, preparing for the worst and most likely, a horrid diaper.

No crinkling of an unfolding garment, however, which meant the other thing: a cloth diaper. Why she even thought of the alternative was beyond her and enough to self-loathe even more. But, even that theory fell limp once she felt something small be tossed next to her on the bed.

The lack of things done to her in such a vulnerable moment hardly matched the tempo this was all supposed to be. Despite it seeming so vile to admit, Dawn partly resonated with Stacy’s ranting; what was wrong with this Amazon?

Dawn turned her head to find a small rectangular device. A strikingly familiar one. It was her smartphone.

“Th-this is...” Dawn had already sat up, stammering as she found that it was still powered and wasn’t some fake. It had the same password and same fingerprint identification. Amazons couldn’t seamlessly replicate technology from her world, right?

“It’s the real thing. To the best of my knowledge.” He added his second statement with a tone that threatened to chuckle. Given Dawn’s personal context, even in the short time she’d been apart from James, life had become a setting far too grim for there to be any humor.

It certainly was her phone. She recognized all the recent photos, albeit that was her only test, given a lack of service in a different dimension. Sufficient nonetheless, however the novelty lasted but a few seconds once the newly added piece fell into the full picture. What silver lining was her phone without a passport or visa? A phone was less than a crumb of hope if it didn’t lead to any of her other belongings. At best she could have photos of her identification on her phone, yet her overflowing sense of pessimism hardly believed in that route should she even have the photos.

“How did you even get this?” She asked, yet the curiosity was just about gone entirely. “How did you even find me?”

James kept a friendly expression, yet Dawn sensed an almost touchy vibe from him. “The phone is one thing, that is something that might upset you... As for finding your room, you may not like how I did it.”

“I don’t care.” She answered plainly without another thought. She’d already been beaten and battered so much and her time left as a free person was audibly ticking. “Just tell me.” She left James this morning feeling angry and betrayed. Those things hadn’t disappeared by any means, but call her overdramatic because they felt so insignificant in the face of her own mortality.

James nodded his head, though took a brief glance around the room. Whether he had an opinion on the state of the room or not, he didn’t vocalize it. Instead, “Is it okay if I take a seat on the bed?” In other words, sit next to Dawn.

She didn’t readily reply. Instead she stared at him blankly, trying to dissect the intent, weigh anything that may not have been considered, or...

James made a sudden move, causing Dawn to jump a little. “Actually, this stool here doesn’t look too bad,” he said as he pulled over the Little step stool Dawn had been using by the door. It seemed grossly undersized compared to James’ size, but neither made further mention of it.

“So, the phone, your phone...” He put his hands together as the explanation came to mind. “I didn’t realize until later on that we had your phone the entire time. Please hear me out when I say this before you react, but I think that Katherine kept it a secret so that we could focus on--”

“--She didn’t keep it a secret,” Dawn curtly corrected him, “she outright lied to me. I asked her about my stuff and she lied. She said they were gone.” And there was the devil in the details. Intentionally leaving out certain facts was different from contradicting them entirely.

As fair and neutral as James may have outwardly seemed, he was more than likely leaning in Katherine’s favor and willing to cut her slack, given their marriage.

“I guess what I mean is that I think my wife had good, honest intentions. I don’t want to argue about that. I didn’t want to make you angry.”

“I’m not angry.” Dawn said, though essentially lied. She wanted to appear civil, yet it probably looked silly, given her claims of the sky being green despite the very blue look on her face.

“I found your phone in Katherine’s purse by chance on the drive back home. I haven’t talked to Katherine about it yet, but I took it while she was sleeping in the car.”

“So you went home, found my phone, then drove back here just to give it back?” The lack of belief was beyond evident in Dawn’s voice.

James did nothing but shrug. “I told you not all Amazons are as bad as you think?”

There was a burning desire to follow up with that by asking about her pants, but she didn’t. Despite James being who he was, beyond his Amazonian tendencies, Dawn still stuck by the notion that he was the most upstanding giant she’d met here. Even as an enemy, Dawn would believe in him on account of his morals. That, and if he were willing to tell her about a phone, why omit something about clothes?

Rather than trying to meet him in the middle, Dawn skipped the “grand revelation” and moved things along. “That doesn’t explain how you found me.” Maybe she was being unfair. After all, he did say that they were two separate explanations. No, she definitely was being unfair. She just didn’t care, whether she had respect for him or not.

“No, it doesn’t,” he gave a small nod, even behind his neutral expression, somehow showing reluctance through his eyes. “When I asked at the front desk about you, they were reluctant to give out information on you, but...” He slowed the pace of his words. Dawn started to scrutinize the look on his face. Was it discomfort? Hard to believe James had any of that. Particularly any Amazon when it came to Littles. “They were a bit more helpful when I lied, saying that I changed my mind and came to adopt you...”

“They just told you? That’s all you had to say?” Dawn asked in half-disbelief, yet it quickly became self-realization that she was the fool for thinking Amazons had reasonable standards. Of course her information was publicly available when it involved servitude in diapers.

“I don’t plan on doing that at all, though,” James assured her, and Dawn did believe him, yet her respect for him fell even more into question with such a devious tactic.

James stood back up, bending his knees a little to get the comfortability back in them from sitting on a Little stool.

He sort of stared at Dawn for a few moments. No words were exchanged, just silent thoughts running through both party’s heads. Though from Dawn’s perspective, it was beginning to become unnerving.

James spoke, but the tone had shifted. Maybe it was familiarity that somehow set him apart from any other Amazon as of late, but a familiar kind of intimidation came rushing back. “Dawn? Is there something you’re not telling me?”

Her words failed her for a moment. She felt the intimidation, but it wasn’t a stranger’s kind. It felt authoritarian, like a...a parent that knew their child was up to no good. “Wh...what?” She could only meagerly reply.

“I know you weren’t expecting me, so I guess if we ignore that you answered the door half-naked, which you probably shouldn’t do in the future,” Dawn took that as a jab, “you didn’t make any attempt to get changed after the fact?”

Dawn wanted to reply with some sort of argument, especially to criticize him for making such a big deal about her being half-naked, but of course it was unusual. It was a sign of something. What’s more, did Dawn even want him to know what was happening? It was her seemingly certain demise once the sun came up and her last lifeline had fallen through. Why did she need to bother giving a spectator a recap?

“Dawn?” James lifted his brows the slightest bit, “You can talk to me, you know?”

And the look on her face only became more flustered. She felt caught in a way despite doing nothing wrong. Why couldn't he have just up and left after giving her phone back? Sure, she was grateful, but he hadn't earned an explanation.

But he didn't seem to fish for one any further. Not because he'd given up, but because now he started to step around the room.

"What are you doing...?" Dawn asked in a shy, reserved voice. As she turned she kept the comforter bundled in a way to mask her lower half.

He was pushing in one of the drawers Dawn had left open while looking for her luggage. "Tidying up," he explained. "Not sure why, but I guess I've always been fond of a neat and clean kinda room?" He chuckled.

For a brief moment Dawn felt less than in that regard, as if he were passively judging her character. "That's because I...it's messy because I was looking for something..." She didn't mean to tell him that much, yet the lack of sleep and exhaustion on all fronts seemed to have loosened her filter.

"Oh yeah?" He chatted as he continued to clean the room for her. "Look for what? Whenever Katherine misplaces something on a trip we have to turn the whole resort over..."

The follow-up made her realize her blunder. Why was she even trying to be secretive?

"N-nothing..." She poorly dismissed it. "Don't you have to go now?" She knew he was working, somehow feeling annoyed that she bothered to remember anything about him or Katherine.

"I will, I just wanna clean this room a little bit..." He said casually and readily, yet he did seem absorbed in the process.

"That's what the maids are for." Dawn said plainly. "You can go now."

James stood back up after setting the trash bin in the corner by the TV stand. "If you insist," he chuckled again. "I'll just tell one of the maids to swing by--"

"*NO!*" It was next to an almost involuntary response. Dawn's hands fiercely clutched the fabrics of bedding around her as she audibly breathed. A deranged look awoke in her eyes as she became a shivering, cornered animal. Her plea had sounded so pained as she was already welling up with tears.

James looked surprised by such an answer as he cautiously came over and took a seat on the bed. Dawn couldn't even look at him as she tried to control her emotions.

"Dawn, what's going on?" He asked.

"It's...it's nothing!" Dawn tried to shout, but the words came out shaky. She took another deep breath. "I'm fine...so leave already. But don't tell anybody about me..." She couldn't have made her troubles more obvious if she tried.

"No." Was the response.

Truly husband and wife, it seemed that even James could only abide so much before biting back.

"Leave! You gave me my phone, so fucking leave already!" Dawn tearfully shouted.

"Take a breath, Dawn," James said with a cautioning hand.

"Get out already! GET OUT!" Dawn shouted, standing up to appear more to his size when he sat. She was blubbering, but still defiant.

"Dawn, you're making a lot of noise..." James continued to say in a calm voice.

But Dawn continued to shout and stomp, seeing right through James' attempts to rationally speak with her. The only thing that got her to go quiet and limp was a knock on the door. Both turned their heads, yet in Dawn's eyes she was seeing a ghost. She stumbled forward and bounded across the bed, going as far as to slip right off the edge and onto the floor.

"Dawn!" James had spoken with concern, but turned his head back to the door.

Dawn was in a fetal position as she sat against the bed frame, trying to pretend like she didn't exist. She was losing it. Trying to kick out an Amazon only seemed to make more swarm. When would it end?

She was too busy and trapped in her own head to hear the door open.

"Yes, hello?" It was James answering the door for her.

“Hello...” The woman sounded like she was trying to look past James for something. “I’m sorry if this is the wrong room, but I’m the next one over; I could’ve sworn I heard some girl throwing a tantrum in here?”

Dawn’s nails started to dig into her skin.

She could hear James making an apologetic laugh. “I’m sorry, could you hear that? My daughter’s always difficult when it comes to bedtime; I’m very sorry for the noise...I promise, you won’t hear another peep from us.”

There was a chuckle from the woman; the forced pleasantries of conversation amongst strangers. “Oh so that’s what it was! I heard there were a bunch of Portal Littles staying in this hotel, so I thought one of them was about to need some discipline...”

“Oh, really? I didn’t know there were any in this hotel.”

“So it would seem...” her response sounded opinionated and disapproving. “But I’m sorry to bother about the noise! Make sure to remind your daughter that throwing tantrums is what a Little would do!”

“Haha, trust me, I will!” James said as he closed the door.

Dawn turned to look up at him as he rounded the corner of the bed.

“Can we please not shout anymore?” James asked. “From the looks of it, that’d be more for your sake than mine.”

Quietly, Dawn nodded her head. Undeniably, he had saved her.

“She...she took my fucking pants!” Dawn said in a distressed, but much more indoor voice as she poured out to James. “My passport, my visa, it’s all gone. All my luggage...”

James quietly nodded. “Up the creek and without a paddle?”

It hardly felt like the time for analogies. “If you feel like minimizing it, sure.” She said bitterly. But finally with someone who might give her some insight into this twisted dimension, “She can’t just do that, can she? Take my stuff and strand me here? Can’t I call the police?”

She was expecting a resounding 'yes', but the expression on James' face only became more contemplative. "It's not as cut and dry..."

"Cut and dry? Why the hell not?!" Dawn raised her voice, but looked remorseful almost immediately as James gave her a look with regards to the visit she just had. "Wh-why...why would it be difficult?"

"Dealing with Littles complicates the laws here, Dawn," he started to explain, "Unfortunately laws regarding Littles here have been black and white for a long time, not so much in your favor, and only until recently are courts even starting to consider what'd be called a grey area."

"This is theft though!" Dawn countered. "Little or not, it should be pretty black and white!"

"Even if the police believed you," James paused to give Dawn a warning signal with his hand, seeing that she was ready to bite right back at that remark, "which isn't what I'm saying personally, but what the cops might do, the entire circumstance you're going through is pretty much unheard of..."

"But she said that she does it regularly!"

"Then that explains why this is as abnormal as it is," James responded, giving an answer Dawn could just barely swallow. "Our society has enough trouble as it is with Littles, let alone Portal ones. I don't even think that our laws have official recognition of Portal Littles, Dawn. You technically are as much of a Little as a natively born one."

Dawn gave him a speechless stare as she laughed insanely, sitting back down.

"Unbelievable...everything in this dimension is just designed to stand against me? She can just take away my home and livelihood and get away with it?"

James obviously didn't want to be the one to tell her that, and it showed by the hurt expression he wore, which is why he stayed silent.

"My god, I really am stuck here..." She stared off in disbelief. It felt strangely fine to say out loud, yet that only meant she somehow wasn't feeling the full force of it yet.

"Dawn..." James exhaled before continuing, "I can't just leave you here."

Dawn gave him an incredulous look, as if he had the gall to say such a thing. "Why? Because it's so convenient for you now?"

James finally frowned a little. “No, because you’ve said it yourself. You’re stuck here for the time being and your tour guide left you in this room so that you’d be adopted by some stranger. I’m not letting that happen.”

His assertiveness was unexpected. Up until then James had been lax and a cooperative listener. Since when did he take the initiative?

“Yeah, sure. You’re funny.” Dawn quite plainly shut him down. She wasn’t being adopted by anybody. Outside her own head though, maybe it was having that brief moment of safety under his presence that fueled her ignorance into thinking there were any real options left.

“Dawn, if you don’t come with me, what else are you going to do?”

“I’ll figure something out.” She said without a single forethought in mind. Whatever her alternative or lack of one was, it didn’t change her extreme reluctance to going with James.

“Figure what out?” James pressed further. “If there’s going to be any way to figure this out, Dawn, you don’t have enough time to do it here. Please, just let me take you back to the house where you can--”

“Are you kidding?! They’re leaving for my portal back home tomorrow!” Dawn whined. “I can’t go anywhere! If I go back to your house I doubt there’ll be any time to get back here in the morning! Besides,” she then gave him a much more scornful look, “did you expect me to just forgive you two after everything you did to me?”

“Everything we did...?” James raised a brow. “What do you mean by that?”

Dawn rolled her eyes. “You’re joking, right? You practically apologized to me when you carried me into the hotel this morning!”

“Whatever I did say, I meant by how everything turned out, not what me or Katherine tried to do for you. It was all in your best interest.”

Dawn scoffed. “Uh-huh, yeah, sure.”

“You really don’t believe me?”

“Says the guy married to a woman that lied about having my phone?”

Apparently that crossed a line. James used a stern tone with a look of tried patience. “By now I would’ve been expecting a genuine apology from *you*. After everything Katherine and I have done for you today, you’ve only acted like a spoiled brat.”

“Spoiled? Don’t you even--!”

“You were being adopted by a stranger before we intervened!” James said plain as day. “Would you have rathered that we let you go?”

Dawn’s tone started to grumble into an angry response, yet the solid fact caught her tongue. “Y-yeah, well, that doesn’t excuse everything else you did to me!”

“Taking you back to the hotel?” James said with genuine confusion. “Buying you clothes? Trying to give you medical treatment after you injured yourself from running away?”

Dawn furrowed her brow. “Well...you said I didn’t owe you anything for the clothes! So it doesn’t count!”

James’ look of fury seemed to have sputtered at that point. With a sigh he said, “If you’re going to argue off of common courtesy and good manners, there’s nothing left to talk about. I don’t think all Littles need to be treated like children, but you’re starting to make me think otherwise.”

The...the nerve of him!

“Get out. Get the fuck out.” Dawn angrily pointed to the door. “I don’t need any more of your help. Not after all the bullshit you’ve put me through. Yeah, thanks for saving me, but *fuck* you for trying to get anything else out of me!”

“I think it’s time to leave, too.” James said as he stood up. “But not without you. You’re coming with me.”

Dawn grew even more agitated. What was he not getting? “And to think, I actually thought you were a half-decent Amazon.” Dawn frowned. “I’m not leaving. Go away already.”

“I’m trying to help you, Dawn. Please, Littles in a situation like this don’t get this kind of opportunity...”

“Yeah, well even if they did, I bet they’d at least have enough self-respect to refuse.” She crossed her arms. “Christ, this is just some petty attempt for you to try and ‘adopt’ me because it’s convenient for you now, isn’t it?”

“I already said...Katherine and I wanted it to be consen--”

“Well you have my consent for nothing.” Dawn coldly cut him off.

James was quiet for a bit longer as he seemed to be breathing, and staring. “...I’m starting to lose my--”

“--patience,” Dawn finished for him. “Me too. Now, don’t let the door hit you on the way out. Bye-bye,” she casually waved her hand.

Nothing happened for a moment. James’ look didn’t change, and he continued to breath, but he quickly moved forward.

“Fine, I tried to do this the mature way.”

In a simple motion he hooked his arm behind and around Dawn’s waist as she was swooped into the air.

“W-wait, what?!” Dawn yelped as she was lifted up with such speed. “Wh-what the fuck are you doing? Put me down!”

“After all that profanity and tantrum you just threw?” James gave her his own look of disbelief. “No. We’re leaving, and that decision is final. Be upset if you want, but this is for your own good.”

Dawn tried to press away, but even if that were possible with Katherine, which it wasn’t, that by extension only meant she was currently trying to press on cement walls with how firm James’ Amazon muscles were. His firm grip on her was iron.

“Put me down! Let me go!” Dawn raised her voice as he turned in place.

“Whine all you want, you’re not being put down.” James said with a scolding voice. He bent over to pick up Dawn’s phone. “Is there anything else in the room that you need? This is the last time we’re gonna be in here.”

“No it’s not! I’m not leaving, so let me go!” Dawn growled as she slammed her fists against his chest and kicked her feet against his side, but it was like shooting a water gun at the sun.

“I’ll take that as a ‘no’ then,” he left it at that as he stepped with her into the hall.

“What are you doing?! I don’t have any pants!” Dawn complained and criticized, left with only her words as viable tools.

James ignored her as he carried her down the hall. It was falling in place for Dawn very quickly. She was going to be taken from the hotel. She’d miss her chance to go with the others back to the portal. Her chance to even get to the window of escape was already slipping.

“H-help...” Dawn whimpered quietly, then started to shout. She shouted even louder than the first time she argued with James. “HELP! SOMEBODY HELP!”

“Dawn, that’s enough of that!” James tried to tell her to stop, but she kept screaming.

“I’M BEING KIDNAPPED! HELP!”

James continued to walk, but to Dawn’s glee a door did open, a room next to hers.

“Oh? Oh! You’re from the room right over!” It was an Amazon woman who was rubbing her eyes.

James did turn around to face her. “You’re the...oh, jeez, I’m so sorry for waking you up...I know I promised the noise wouldn’t happen again...”

“Well, what happens happens,” the Amazon woman shrugged it off as her vision adjusted to what was in James’s arm. “Oh! And is this the little troublemaker that kept me from sleeping?” She got a better look at Dawn, then shifted her expression. “Oh...she’s a Little?”

“She is,” James said, “and we were just leaving, actually. And to be honest with you she’s not even my daughter; just someone I figured that I’d do a favor for, but quite frankly she’s being a brat about it.”

Dawn frowned as she kicked and struggled. This James didn’t sound like the one she was at least complacent with before. Sure she was being pissy, but he was being an ass right then, too.

Something made Dawn feel off though once James finished his sentence. Not about what he said, but how it seemed to make the woman feel.

“Is that so...?” The corners of her mouth raised. “Well, I think you’ve certainly been patient enough with her? After all, tolerating a single tantrum I think is already being generous to these little troublemakers.” She leaned over to boop Dawn on the nose and it left the girl fuming, yet

that only seemed to incite more intrigue from the woman. “Since you don’t have any real obligation to her, why don’t I take her off your hands?” She smiled at James sweetly. “I’ve actually been meaning to adopt!”

Dawn’s look of fury turned into one of horror. This woman was trying to adopt her on the spot? Even...even if James was mad, he wasn’t insane, right...?

Apparently even James wasn’t expecting the gesture. “Well, I appreciate it and all, but...”

“And look!” The woman continued to insist. “She is butt-naked! Heavens...it’s a good thing I’ve been carrying a diaper in my purse...” She muttered as she turned her head back into her room. “What do you say, though? I’ve always wanted to be a Mommy, and I’d love a little girl that needs discipline!”

“J-James...” Dawn turned her head up to him. “P-please...”

Even James seemed to have a heart. “Miss, thank you for offering, but I think I’m gonna keep a hold on her for now. Sorry, we’ll get out of your hair.”

The woman’s look wasn’t so pleasant, as if she’d just been cheated out of a shiny gem.

“Really? So you’re just going to be a bother through and through? Fine. I’ll just call the front desk to complain about all the noise that unadopted Little has been making. See you in diapers soon, sweetheart!” And with a chuckle she went back into her room.

“What...what the fuck...?” Dawn said at a loss for words.

“That’s what’s waiting for you if you stay here,” James said not as a threat, but an honest warning. “Besides, she just said she’s going to call the front desk. Dawn, we can’t stay here. *You* can’t stay here.”

“But...but I can’t just leave...!” She was starting to tear up. That strange encounter sobered her hatred for James, and even his own bothered attitude.

“Dawn, look at me,” James lifted her up to face him clearly. “I promise you that this won’t be the end. We will do everything in our power to get this figured out, but please, we can’t do it here. One of the worst things that can happen is us staying and LPS gets involved. If that happens I can’t protect you.”

“LPS? What even is that?” Dawn wiped her eyes.

“I can explain later, but it’s something you don’t want to deal with.”

Time was obviously running out, and thanks to some random bitch that fuse was now running significantly shorter.

Dawn looked away for a moment, as if she couldn’t believe herself what she was considering. “You...you promise?”

“...Cross my heart.”

“F...fine...! Let’s just go already!”

James needn’t another word to walk to the elevator.

Dawn laid limp in his hold as her final decision seemed to have sapped her entirely. She likely just made the most life changing decision she would ever make. It was induced out of pressure, danger and severity, but it was her choice nonetheless.

As they rode the elevator down, they would soon begin to travel farther from the hotel. Farther from the bus that would collect all the Portal Littles. Farther from the Portal station that would take her back to Earth. Farther from her life as she knew it. Closer to a future of uncertainty.

What have I done?