

## 18 - Propaganda Prison

“What do you mean, ‘play with the books?’” Dawn barely managed to hold back a scoff. “I’m here to *read* them like everyone else!”

“And you can go read lots of fun stories in here?” Grace deflected and redirected with her finger. “I bet if you gave them a chance, you’d be really surprised how good they are!”

“And I want a book that isn’t made from cardboard or more pictures than actual words,” Dawn frowned. “What kind of rule even is that, anyway? Ka—” she stammered then stopped, but Grace was being patient enough to allow her to continue. Let the Little finish her tantrum.

“Mmm...*Mommy*,” *fucking christ!* “--She didn’t say anything about a rule like that.”

“You can always ask her when she comes back, sweetheart, but it’s a lot safer for you in here. Big kid books are too big and hard to read, anyway,” she waved her hand and just a few more years brushed off Dawn’s shoulders. “Come on,” Grace stood back up, but not before taking Dawn’s hand. “Let’s go give those books another peek, alright? Mommy said you liked reading, didn’t she?”

*Reading stuff that’s actually interesting... Not whatever baby books that are in here...!*

Thus a second round of perusing had begun, only now Dawn was chained and shackled to her tour guide. “Let’s see...!” Grace hummed with infectious enthusiasm that Dawn was thankfully vaccinated against. The Amazon was slouched over just to see the top shelf of the shorter furniture, and Dawn was trying to look anywhere but Grace tried to call attention to.

“Oou, how about this one?” Dawn didn’t watch, but she could hear the plastic laminated cover slide out from the crowd of crazy literature. The librarian tapped into her secondary skill as a nursery school teacher, because slowly and carefully she enunciated the cover, “Tumbly Tiger’s Big Adventure,” then held the front of it out to Dawn. “That sounds like a fun one, right?”

As a fun fact, at least for standard literature, the best stories were the ones that were actual good stories. Tales that could leverage basic devices and spin them as something new or synthesize with totally new ideas altogether. Words can bring the imagination to life and the true imagery is born inside the head. There was stuff like comics too, which was also impressive, but acknowledging that would hurt the crux of what was keeping Dawn so agitated right now.

A soft-shaded pastel tiger with rounded nubs for fangs, walking on two legs with a bright friendly face didn’t inspire confidence for the potential complexities a tale like that might have.

“No.”

“No?” Grace repeated, playing up her surprise. “Well...” she hummed as she thumbed through a few wide pages by herself, “I think there’s some really cool pictures in this one?” she pulled back the book to peer down at Dawn again. “Maybe we should give it a try?”

“What are the themes?”

“Themes?” Ha. Guess Grace didn’t expect a pretend three-year old to ask something like that.

“What’s the genre?” Dawn doubled down. “Mystery? Romance?” If Grace was going to stall and waste her time, certainly she was at least going to give her something with some meat on it? Something to sink her teeth into? Christ, for plot convenience Tumbly the fucking Tiger was probably friends with the whole animal kingdom; prey and all. Too bad the carnivore would somehow be a vegetarian. If that tiger’s teeth were too dull to bite, at least let Dawn consume something...!

“This story...” Grace skimmed the back of it, “teaches us that it’s important to *share* and follow the *rules*. Wanna go over to the sitting circle and check it out?” Grace insisted yet again.

“No,” Dawn repeated once more.

“...Okie-dokie!” Grace, brushing off the cold rejection, slid the book back in its place. “There’s lots more to choose from. So let’s see...”

And while Grace put in all the team effort on her own, Dawn dragged her feet in a small circle, just barely catching glimpses of more unfortunate sights.

*Being Big Again*

*Counting Three’s*

*Kingdom Under the Crib*

*Traded - Learning to Share*

*Not Fair - Why Rules are Good!*

*Breaking the Toy*

Funny how titles were supposed to be the earworms that hooked your brain and caught your attention. They all certainly worked wonders at inciting emotion, only all the negative ones. Maybe. Just *maybe* something out of all these shelves could receive the bare minimum score of entertaining or passable for the adult mind, but her standards were far beyond a tolerable place now that she knew she was being forced to choose among a filtered selection. If she didn't get any leniency, the institution would be getting none either.

"How about this one? Doesn't this look silly?"

"No."

"Oou...! *This* one is about space! Do you like stars?"

"Nope."

"Then...oh, how about kitties? Aren't cats so cute?"

"I'm not interested."

Again and again. Three finite resources were being drained and it was only a matter of time to figure out which was in the shortest supply. Grace's patience? Dawn's stubbornness? Or, the worst of all, the seemingly endless torture trove of baby books to sift through?

And just when the corner of Grace's mouth was starting to hide behind her cheek, the battle was shifting in the Little's favor. "Jeez, Dawn! You're an awfully picky reader!" Even if it was minor and a disguised reaction, obviously it meant something. Surely. The mild discomfort only emboldened the girl's resistance...!

And soon enough Grace was back to crouching with her knees pressed together, scanning the selection for yet another recommendation. Though she chuckled with a mutter, "You're just as picky as your Mommy..."

*Ugh.*

The offhand comment came at her like a rusty, slimy hook. Something gross and ill-inducing that had no business invading her headspace. *Comparing* them? Her and Katherine? What similarities? *Books*? Maybe. Just maybe the faintest thread existed, but that was pure coincidence. Nothing else. It was a thread of fate that existed like so many others between passing strangers on the street. Their relationship went absolutely no further than that, so to hear

a complete stranger, acting so friendly and familiar, treating Dawn like she was actually Katherine's...!

“*Grace!*” an exasperated voice caught wind of the Amazon and Little. Katherine, standing by the entrance to the prison pen, identically dressed now compared to her friend, was looking a tad bit upset. “You actually took her?”

Dawn tried to hide her side eye, wishing there hadn't been anyone to show her any of this at all. But more importantly, even if it was out of obligation, the closest thing to an advocate for Dawn had returned. Her... “*savior.*”

Grace came back to her feet with a chuckle and shrug. “You mean you'd keep your little girl bored and waiting just so you could be the one to bring her here?” she laughed. “Sorry~! Guess I wanted to be nice!”

And since she couldn't say it aloud, Dawn kept her insults and scoffs to herself, tucked away nicely inside the filing cabinet that lived inside her head. Filed under “Why I hate Amazons,” an unsurprisingly expanding folder...

Apparently Katherine had been checkmated, because she didn't pursue the taunt. Instead she entered the Little's den and crouched right beside Dawn, giving her a warm smile.

“Are you looking for something fun to read?”

“N-...” Dawn started to react, then skipped to the main issue altogether. “--I want to go see the other books in the library.”

“The other books?” Katherine tilted her head.

“Yes, the other books,” Dawn stressed. “Not a bunch of books for babies and kids. *Real* books!”

“I tried to tell her...” Grace quietly added from over the Little's head.

“...Dawn,” Katherine started after glancing up at her friend, “All the books here are *really* big. Sometimes they can be a little hard to read too; even for me!”

“And I'm not here to read books for kids!” Dawn stressed. “When you said you were taking me here, I actually thought I'd get to read meaningful stuff; not kids books!”

“But you *can* learn a lot from these? See?” Katherine explained, grabbing one of the nearest books. “Belinda’s Buzzy Business,” she recited just like Grace did, and even traced her finger slowly with each and every word. A fat ball of black and yellow lines with tiny wings and a face smiled on the cover. “This one teaches you about all the big important jobs there are in nature?”

*Through what, the imaginary friendships and conversations animals of different species in a complex ecosystem would never have?*

“I don’t want to read that...! I...I want to read something...” Fuck, was there really no better word? “Something *mature!*”

“Dawn, there’s nothing wrong with these books?”

With few effective tricks, Dawn opted for the litmus test. “Would *you* read it?”

“Would I?” Katherine repeated, glancing down at the cover. “Sweetie, of course I’d read it? When it’s break time later we can read it together?”

*Together? No! No! No!*

“You...!” Dawn groaned with her hands in her hair. “Why did you even get my hopes up...! So what: I’m stuck in here the whole day? In this stupid pen with no actual books to read?”

“I thought you liked books, though?”

“Stop *twisting* it!” Dawn cried. “You *know* this isn’t what I meant! I read *actual* books! Novels! Memoirs! Biographies! I want prose; poems! Murder mysteries, romance, science fiction, post-apocalypse, war, famine, politics; anything that none of this stupid corner has...!”

A sharp prickle stung her back when she heard Grace comment from behind, directly to Katherine and completely over her fake-daughter, “That stuff really isn’t appropriate for a Little...?”

And the fuse had been lit. The fire was about to blaze, and just when Dawn and her diapered ass was about to turn on her foot to give not just a piece of her mind, but the whole goddamn thing, a pair of Amazon arms clamped around her and into a hug.

“Dawn, I know it can be frustrating when we don’t like the rules, but we have them for good reasons?” Katherine explained, and Dawn wriggled and squirmed.

She wasn't dumb, though. She was fully aware that she was ready to blow up at Grace, and more than likely say quite a few things that at the bare minimum would've been "unfriendly." She wasn't dumb because she knew Katherine wasn't completely either. Katherine was smart, just...selectively ignorant. Like everyone else. Even if the affection right now was genuine, the practical use of a hug right now meant more than the emotional. In other words, Dawn was one step away from upping her tantrum and Katherine saw it coming. Was she really getting that predictable?

Katherine rubbed her back. "Dawn, the library gets very busy during the day, and it's just not safe to let all the Littles that come here with their Mommies and Daddies run around?"

"The library isn't a playground, Dawn," Grace added, like she thought she was actually being helpful.

"And I'm not here to *play!*" Dawn scrutinized Katherine. "I'm not reading anything here! I want actual books!" But apparently she couldn't, all because of discrimination.

"Shh...okay," Katherine calmly and quietly hushed, and to need any of that only made the girl in her arms more upset. She wasn't making a scene! Her anger was justified! This was fair! Stop trying to put her out like a pesky, unimportant fire! "How about this: can we make each other a promise?"

A promise? A deal? If it was *anything* that could even remotely excite Dawn, it better have been in writing. Then again, what system was in place to actually stop an Amazon from cheating a Little? After all, it'd been done time and time again so easily and carefree.

While Dawn wasn't answering, she was looking.

"If *you* promise to be on your best behavior today, once it's my break, *I* promise I'll take you around the library, okay? We can look at some of the books."

It was a trick. A trap. Some kind of clause that undid anything that was seemingly a benefit to the poor girl. She should refuse. She should ignore it. And yet... "...Really?" Why...why did she have to get her hopes up...?!

"Yes, really," Katherine nodded quite soundly. "It's a promise, okay?"

"F...fine." Lay low. Pretend like she didn't exist the whole day, then reap the rewards.

Slowly she was released from her ride and Dawn was back on her own two feet. Katherine, calm and collected, tuned her expression to be a bit more cheery. “*And*, I want you to find at least one book in here to read, okay?”

“What?” Dawn’s mouth went crooked and her eyebrows sank. “That wasn’t part of the deal!” She couldn’t do that! The imaginary papers had already been signed! And then, *oh*, then Katherine had the audacity to say...

“Dawn?” she raised the tone of her voice, warping it into a warning, like whatever good faith the girl had just been coasting on was about to be irreparably broken. Why was this fair? Why did she get to do this? Making up rules, terms and conditions after the fact they agreed to something? “You’re gonna be in here for the most of the day, so I *want* you to find something you’ll like...?”

“Th-the whole day?” Dawn stammered in surprise, but how obvious it should’ve been was only hitting her in the moment, plain as day for Katherine and Grace to hear and see.

“Your Mommy needs to help everyone visiting the library, sweetheart!” Grace chimed in, and Dawn wished she simply didn’t exist.

“I’m gonna be on the same floor the whole time,” Katherine assured, and Dawn was drifting further from anything even remotely close to complacency. The only halfway decent thing that saved Dawn from asking embarrassing questions was by the woman reading her mind for her.

“Another nice friend of mine is gonna be here all day with you, okay? It’s her job to pick out all the fun stories you can listen to! Maybe you’ll like some of those?”

The *sitting* circle, as Grace had called it, struck the girl’s mind. The giant rocking chair and bean bag seats... This was just a pseudo-daycare. A dropoff for kids while their parents got what they needed...! Sure, maybe it wasn’t one officially in name, but right then it was clear by just how much Katherine was toeing the line with what did and did not count as childcare that Dawn didn’t need...!

“You’re gonna get to meet lots of other kids your age, too?” Grace, again with her horrible facts, added.

And with all that in her head, Dawn couldn’t have looked more disappointed with believing for just a second that she really dodged any kind of bullet with her so few rules that she made Katherine abide. No daycares? Sure. No library baby-watch stops, though? Fair game, for sure!

“Grace...” Katherine looked up at her friend, “Is...do you think Dayna might be willing to swap with me?” Swap with who? Dayna? What, was that the name of today’s warden?

“You can try, but she goes on vacation tomorrow...” Grace faded out, implying something obvious only to the two Amazons. “If it were me, I wouldn’t wanna lose the fun job on my last day...”

And Katherine sighed, exchanging her disappointed look with Dawn. “Yeah...me neither...”

“She should be here any minute now, I think,” Grace murmured, glancing at a phone in her hand. “And shoot! Oops, gotta go! I need to make it over to the front desk... See ya soon! By Dawn!” she flashed a hand as she left the pen, finally leaving the original pair alone. Now at least it felt a bit easier for Dawn to speak her mind.

“You lied to me.”

“Lied? What?”

“I said no daycare, and you promised!” Dawn hissed.

“I did promise, though?” Katherine agreed, but the mutual understanding stopped there. “You’re not at daycare right now?”

“Then what is this?!” Dawn waved her arms, making it a very deliberate point to motion towards the fence surrounding the space. “I’m just supposed to be stuck here all day? I can’t leave on my own, and I have to read a bunch of stupid books that I could care less about?”

“Dawn, you shouldn’t be saying something like that... Stupid isn’t a nice word...?”

“No.” Finally, Dawn put *her* foot down. “No,” she said again, “No! I played your game. Fine, I’m not swearing anymore,” vocally, at least, “but you’re not policing stuff like ‘stupid’ and ‘dumb’. I’m not gonna call anyone that, but I am keeping that.”

Some kind of mantra must have been circulating through Katherine’s head, because she didn’t bite back on the argument. Instead she took a breath before saying, “Please, just behave,” she reminded, and Dawn tried not to flare her nostrils.

And as determined as Dawn looked, she stuttered as she asked, “What...what happens when I need to use the bathroom? How am I supposed to get you if you’re not gonna be in here?”



“I’ll check on you regularly to see if you need a change,” Katherine said simply.

“No. That’s not what I asked. *Bathroom. Toilet,*” Dawn leaned on her words.

“What?” Finally, Katherine was starting to become oblivious to the things that’d been debated and discarded so one-sidedly long ago. “Dawn, honey, that’s why you have your diaper on. Don’t worry about the potty today, alright?”

“But that’s...!”

“Other people are watching, Dawn. That’s why we need to be good and behave, okay?” And somehow, being good meant being incontinent. Unfair. So unbelievably unfair. “It’s nothing to feel embarrassed about. Everyone in here is gonna be in diapers, too?” And probably just as much not by choice, but what did that matter arguing with mob mentality itself?

And more and more interruptions were always intervening.

“Katherine, hey!” A new voice from behind, and Katherine turned her head.

“Dayna! Good morning!” And just as Katherine stood, her back that once shielded Dawn from exposure was evaporated.

“Good morning, and is this who I think it is?”

“Yes, I think it is,” Katherine laughed with a bashful look. “Does the word really get around that fast?”

“Yes, I think it does,” Dayna nodded, and from the sound of her voice her eyes were probably rolling too. “No offense though, but it really was just a matter of time for you? Everybody knew you were gonna do it at some point...?”

“Jeez, fine, enough of that! Grace was giving me a hard enough time as it is... But, yes, this is Dawn! Dawn, can you say ‘hi’?”

And yet again, being asked to do something before Dawn could do it on her own good faith herself. Was she going to greet the Amazon if unprompted? Absolutely not, but principles were principles.

“Hello.”

“So polite!” Dayna gasped, and Dawn was cringing. The Amazon dropped to her knees, unfortunately. “And how old are you, Dawn?”

“I am in my twenties...” Did big numbers turn them off to the idea of infantilism?

“Oh wow!” Dayna exclaimed the same way any teacher meeting her new kindergarteners might sound, “I guess she’s closer to that age where diapers wouldn’t have been so far away, huh?” Dayna laughed with Katherine, and Dawn watched for her reaction like a hawk.

“So, anyway...” Katherine moved things along, “Just with our situation right now, I decided to bring Dawn into work today, so she’s gonna be here in the Learning Corner while I work.”

“Mhm? That won’t be an issue for me? Were you looking for me to take over?” she pointed out the bag slung over Katherine’s shoulder that Dawn finally noticed.

“Oh, this? No, uhm, I planned on keeping it here nearby, if that’s okay? It’s your last day before vacation, right? I don’t want to give you any more responsibilities,” she laughed, and so did Dayna, and so didn’t Dawn.

Funny how she was a “responsibility” purely because Katherine and the rest of this world turned her into one.

“Okay, sure, that’s fine! I’m sure we’ll be good buds by the end of the day, but check on her as much as you need to,” Dayna smiled nonchalantly.

“Thank you so much!” Katherine clasped her hands appreciatively. “Only thing is, would you mind getting her juice if she asks for it? I packed some bottles for her, and everything’s in here,” Katherine reminded with a jostle from her shoulder. “She knows to behave,” thank goodness, otherwise Dawn was surely going to be a ball of fire. “So if there’s any kind of trouble, just let me know and I can take care of it.”

“Okie-dokie, sounds good!” Dayna nodded, accepting the diaper bag from Katherine. “Anything else I should know?” If only Dawn was allowed to speak in any way whatsoever on how to handle herself; like leaving her the fuck alone.

“All of this is still new to her, so please be patient? I promised her if all I got were good reports from you, then I’d take her around the library to see some of the other books. She likes reading!”

“Oooh!” Dayna mouthed, and Dawn stooped her shoulders while she looked away. “So someone’s gonna be *extra* good today for a special treat, huh? Okay then,” she laughed, “understood!”

“And actually,” Katherine hummed, reaching into the bag now sitting on the bookshelf, “Dawn? Let’s get you started on something to drink.”

And it only hit her after she took the container that it was a bottle. Not a sippy cup. Not a bottle with a twist cap, but the kind topped with a silicone nipple.

“This isn’t my normal cup,” Dawn said plainly.

“Sippy cups are when we’re at home,” Katherine said, not explained. “I packed lots of that melon juice you like, though?” Juice she didn’t even like... Juice she found palatable because it was already decided on and bought for her...!

“Oh, that stuff? My niece can’t get enough of it!” Dayna chuckled. “And you packed her a whole bag of that? Goodness, Dawn, sweetie, I think your Mommy’s gonna spoil you rotten...!”

Certainly everything about this was going to make her adult mind rot.

“Okay... Gotta go for real, this time,” Katherine finally said to Dawn. “Is everything okay? Do you feel fine?”

Hardly. This was reaching new levels of suckiness with each passing minute. “Yes. I’m fine.”

“Okay,” and without asking, Katherine pulled her in for another snug and tight hug. “Like I said, I’m gonna be nearby and I’ll be checking in often, okay?”

“Mhm.”

“Good,” and she crossed the line again with another wet kiss on the forehead that Dawn was rubbing away the moment she turned.

“Thank you again, Dayna!” Katherine waved, though her eyes kept stealing looks at Dawn like she’d never get the chance again.

“Anytime! See you later!”

And she was gone.

Now Dawn was on friend number two, and how things would go from there was pure uncertainty. Dayna smiled nonetheless down at the girl though.

“So Dawn, is this your first time at the library?”

At this one, yes? At any of them? “No? I’ve been to libraries before.” That apparently put a look of surprise on the woman’s face.

“Really, now?”

“Yes?” Was it that surprising?

“I’ve never heard of a library around here allowing Littles in on their own...” Dayna mused.

“But anyway, I’m so glad I get to spend the day with you?”

“Great.” Too bad the feeling was far from mutual.

“Mommies and Daddies come and like to drop their kids off here while they get what they need. Every day there’s someone like me here to read you all lots of fun and exciting stories!” Dayna held a hand to her chest, just in case Dawn didn’t realize that she was the only Amazon within a thirty foot radius.

“Uh-huh.”

“And, from what I know, you must still be pretty new to your Mommy and Daddy, huh? So, something tells me that you might know yourself a *teeny* tiny bit better than Mommy might right now? So, if you’re comfortable telling me, is there anything else that I should know about you?”

What else should she know? What? That Dawn was kidnapped against her will? That she’s stuck in a dimension and far from home? That she had no business whatsoever being in diapers, and that this was all some cheap farce forcing her into something she wasn’t?

“I just want to be left alone.”

“Alone~?” Dayna sang with a gasp. “Well that’s no fun! Don’t you wanna meet all the other kids that are gonna be here soon?”

Was she being serious? No, she probably was. “Not really.” Not at all. What was the best case scenario? Seeing a face she’d likely only ever meet once in her life? What’s worse, someone in

just as shitty of a situation or one that was twistedly worse? The last thing she wanted was a closeup of what she could potentially be destined to become.

“Mm...well, I hope you’ll come around...!”

And Dawn’s unfortunate answer was to simply take a swig from her bottle. Then her eyes drifted to the side, somehow quickly learning to dread what she cherished so much. The army of books surrounding her, all vile in some sort of way, would now become the poison that she was forced to pick, per Katherine’s amended deal...

She reluctantly stuck her free hand out for one of the books, hoping to finish the “fun” sooner rather than later, but her hand was promptly pushed back.

“Ah-ah!” Dayna, tutted, “Dawn, that’s a rule we have here. No food or drinks around the books.” And Dawn looked down at the bottle, dumbfounded.

*Then why in the hell did she give me this...?!*

So sighing, Dawn put the bottle down on the floor in front of her sneakers, resuming the search. But so too did the Amazon hand block her again. Now looking a bit annoyed, Dawn glanced up at the woman.

“No food. No drinks.” Dawn repeated, trying not to sound pissy. Did she not do as she was told?

“Dawn, your juice is right there,” Dayna pointed to the ground with a knowing look. “Finish up your bottle then you can play with the books.” Was reading not even reading anymore? Now it was playing?

“Then put it back in the bag?” Dawn shrugged, like the problem solely lied with the newly appointed caretaker. How wishy-washy were these people going to be? First it wasn’t her problem, then suddenly it was again?

“We’ll put it back once it’s empty, honey. Drink your juice.” More of being told what to do. Dawn did not like.

“...My Mommy said I had to pick out a book to read and show her later... My hands are clean. Do you want me to show you?” And feeling especially bitchy in the most passive way possible, Dawn was already stretching out her arms, waving out her open palms.

“Don’t worry, sweetie, we’ll wipe those down with some wet wipes after. Tell you what: how about I read you something while you drink your juice?”

And Dawn turned her hands, already finding them spotless. What wiping did they need? Was it more gaslighting and conditioning just to make all these stupid rules even more absolute?

Just as she was about to regretfully reach down for her bottle, Dayna’s hand reached forward, flipping up Dawn’s shirt and latching on the front of her pants and diaper included. It was fast and prompt, but for a full few seconds the Amazon peered down the front of her diaper.

“S-stop!” Dawn yelped, pulling back forcefully and hard, but her pants and diaper only slapped shut once Dayna decided to let her go. “Why did you do that?!”

“Because I know what a little attitude sounds like, honey,” Dayna smiled with a knowing look, gamifying her small bout of sexual harrassment. “Dry though... Wet diapiers can sometimes be a bit uncomfy.”

Was this really how the day was going to go? One filled with unprompted, nonconsensual peeks at Dawn’s privates? Ka...Katherine was unacceptable. She shouldn’t be doing it either, but...if Kathrine *was* rock bottom, then A *complete* stranger like Dayna was negative levels beyond the bedrock that her fake Mommy was supposed to be.

“I can *tell* you if I’m wet!” Not that she’d ever say it, though. “Besides, you’re...! You’re not allowed to do that!”

“Dawn, honey, I check diapers for kids in here all the time?”

“And did they *consent* to that? Did they give you permission?”

“Their parents did, sweetie?” Right, because circular logic be damned; how wasn’t this a daycare, again?

“Well *I* didn’t. And no one else gave it to you, either!” What a clever way of avoiding the M-word.

“Then if I can’t check you, how am I going to know once you need a change?”

“Because you aren’t going to know! K...” No way to avoid it this time. “*Mommy* said she was going to check. So it’s none of your business.”

“Uh-huh...” Dayna briefly nodded, and whatever logic and truth she was using, it didn’t seem to be flying by her so freely. And without a definitive conclusion, Dayna stood back up. “Do you wanna drink your juice over at the circle while I get some books together?”

Just so the Amazon could watch her like a hawk? With no words, Dawn grabbed her bottle, half-expecting another sneak attack on her pants. But because there wasn’t, she tried to walk as calmly and noiselessly as she could. If it wasn’t something explicitly annoying to do, or demeaning enough, she was willing to give in to a point that hopefully didn’t make many waves...

It was just her and a stranger trying to be as handsy with her as if she were Katherine. What right did she have? Just Dawn and someone she hardly knew on top of what was going to be an incoming brigade of tots coming and going. More than likely adult bodies, muscles and breasts, diapers and all.

The bags of beans were roundish, irregular and tall. One bag she could see a little bit over as a testament to its height, and she tossed her bottle up on the bright green material wrapped all around it. If only it could have been one of the modern, fur-cloth kinds that actually felt expensive. This was just thick industrial plastic cloth reminiscent of her actual daycare days that was only about bright colors and a rough balance between function and form.

She grabbed onto the smooth material, scraping her hands as she swung her leg to try and force an indent to get into the seat. Her thick snicker slipped though as she leaned into it, trying to climb but only deforming the beady inside.

“Oops, those are a little tough to climb!” Dayna right from behind chuckled, and before Dawn knew it a hand pressed against her bottom, rocketing her straight up and into the seat.

Dawn spun her body to look up at the predator, quickly muttering, “Thank you...” Better to be said fast than told later to do the same.

“Of course!” Dayna smiled, and off she hummed behind the rocking chair, peering down and over all the books along the shelf that Dawn just like every other Little, with or without food and drink was strictly prohibited from.

*Ridiculous...*

Dawn sighed, begrudgingly sucking the bottle. Tiny spurts came out with each tiring suck. Since when was drinking supposed to be an exercise? She held the bottle up to the ceiling, just so gravity made absolutely sure that not an ounce of work was wasted on scoring the liquid.

And it sucked. It sucked so much. Not just the sucking of her bottle, but sucking of how halfway decently good the juice truly was. Whatever melon the taste was supposed to mimic, it didn't change the sweet taste with a tinge of tang. It was like a tropical punch on a warm and sunny day. Too bad she was busy spending hers inside a designated space for children. One bottle later and Dawn was back on her feet. The empty bottle was finished and left behind on the beanbag seat. Finally unhindered, she grabbed the first book she saw off the shelf.

*Nope.*

*Dumb.*

*Boring.*

*Was this one about diapers?*

*A story about milk?*

*A teddy bear army? What kind of ideas did this—*

“Dawn?” A curt voice caught her attention.

Like an afterthought, Dawn glanced over at Dayna and all her many towering feet. Her eyes and mouth were perched on the edge of expectant and disapproval. Great. What was her problem now?

“What? I finished my drink?”

“But we didn't clean off your hands,” Dayna reminded, and Dawn may or may not have “forgotten.”

“My hands are clean, though?”

“Dawn...don't be difficult,” Dayna, apparently the new queen, admonished her. “Put the book down and let's wipe your hands.”

And limiting it to just a look, Dawn did set down the book, standing in place. Maybe Dayna was trying to avoid an argument that the Little, despite being told not to, was priming herself for, because she walked off on her own, rummaging through the diaper bag and coming back with a square white wipe in her hand.



“Can you hold out your hands for me, please?”

And out they came.

The wipes were quick and brief, but her hands certainly felt wet. Thanks, wet wipes. In fact, Dawn would argue that her hands felt even more inept to be handling someone else’s property than they originally did. Not her problem, though. She was just following the “rules.”

“Okay, all clean now. Just let me know if you want another bottle, okay?”

“Uh-huh.”

Back to “playing” she went.

More bad books.

More crimes against literature.

She had progressed to the point of glancing at pages more than just the covers and titles, and the regret was only growing.

The books were off. The contents were strange. They all had simple and obvious lessons, like any kid’s book would, but the teachings and morals were...off.

Learning to share. Being selfless...be kind, be nice... All that was there, but so were other things.

*And Tommy learned that the best way to have fun was being a good little boy, after all.*

*Not a shoe, nor a poo was out of place that night. All thanks to Motherly Moo!*

*Diapers go squish-squish! Panties go dff-dff...*

The illustrations were off. Emphasis on diapers and families weren’t just one-time coincidences Dawn had seen in the other books. It wasn’t all of them, but so many books were far more deceptive than she was realizing. It taught simple lessons, but all the wrong ones.

What’s more, the less offensive stories that weren’t thick slabs of cardboard pages still had their strange material quirks. The pages were still far from paper; thick and tough. Like construction

paper times three, or something. It was smooth and sturdy like the pages themselves were plastic? Not that she'd try to deface a book, but she did press a little, watching the paper-like material bend and arch. What were these things made of...?

"Oops, are we the first ones?" An Amazon, finally not in a uniform but plainclothes, was standing by the entrance of the area, holding a little girl against her hip. Well...no...not little. *A* Little. The mystery was solved once Dawn noticed the slight bumps hiding behind her dress, which was most of everything that she could identify about the girl being once a woman. The curves on her legs were hiding behind her thick, frilly socks traveling up to the knees. Her hips and waist disappeared underneath the length of her sundress. The flowery pin in her straightened hair wasn't doing her any favors either.

"Fraid not!" Dayna laughed, walking past Dawn and up to the front. "She's number two. Who do I have the pleasure of taking in today?"

"This is Kailey," the mother, beaming, set the Little down on the floor, landing on her two feet. "I needed to do some research in one of the computer labs... Is it okay to leave her here for a little bit?"

"Absolutely is! Can you just sign her in right here?" she motioned to a wooden slant extruding out of the framed gate. "Helps us keep track, and all."

"Yeah, I imagine it gets a little busy here?" Dawn watched the woman mutter while she scribbled on something. "Should I leave her supplies?"

"Only if you think you're going to be long."

"Mm..." the Amazon hummed, holding her own equipment bag, similar to the one Katherine got. "Just in case?" She offered it up, and Dayna accepted. "Thank you so much!" the woman smiled appreciatively, and Dawn slowly drifted ahead and around to a private spot behind one of the aisle shelves.

Her back came against the shelf and her bottom sunk until the dry, airy squish hit the floor. She angled a new story on her knees sitting close to her chest. And yet, even when trying to read something that she knew would hurt her, life wouldn't even let have that self-destruction.

With ears too pristine for their own good, Dawn had the displeasure of hearing Dayna start all over again with the newest cut of fresh meat.

"Hi there, Kailey! My name is Dayna."

“Hi...” A quiet, demure voice answered back.

“Sounds like your Mommy’s gonna be a little busy; do you like stories?”

“Yeah...” The girl, Kailey, was it? She sounded shy and reserved. And after Dawn’s far too close encounter with that guy in diapers down the street... *Why* was she shy? Embarrassed, or just emulating that same kid-like behavior that came with meeting new people?

Whatever it was, Kailey must have been a breath of fresh air for Dayna. Since it sounded like she followed the script, the librarian cheered without reservation. “Well~! I *love* stories. And I bet if you tell me something that you really like, I think I can...”

And finally Dawn could tune them out. Good riddance. Still, she dropped the book, trying to stay quiet. The shelf to put it back would mean showing herself to them, and that she wasn’t a fan of. But *she* wasn’t shy, of course. She just wanted to be left alone, just like she told Dayna earlier.

Carefully she stood back up and softly crinkled her way deeper into the tiny maze. Or in other words she went one bookshelf deeper to the far left reach of the corner, positioning herself somewhere between the white picket fence and shelf.

*I’ll just put the other one back later...* Dawn sufficed, leaving the story she brought with her on the floor and reaching over for a new book to disappoint herself with. At this point she’d kill for just an informational text. Something without characters, a plot, or anything else whatsoever. A dictionary, an atlas; something that didn’t have the opportunities to be exploited as a mockery of fiction.

But she didn’t have that, so the best she could do was try not to think too deeply on the content, and instead hang on to enough information that’d at least convince Katherine into thinking she found something. If only she were actually “reading” though.

This wasn’t reading.

The characters didn’t matter, and neither did the story. The more she absorbed and observed, the text only felt more and more superficial. Good stories were written to tell a tale and promote a message second. This was the reverse. It was all busy traffic of vehicles in different shapes and sizes focused on delivering a message first and foremost.

What did the charming prince matter if the princess he rescued rewarded his efforts with a nursery locked away in her tower? Sleeping beauty wasn’t about the heroism of a savior, but just

an easy dressing to promote the importance of naps. It was all so fake and so obvious, yet she had nothing fair to compare it to.

This is all this place was? Propaganda? And to think, Dawn turned her head, peering through the mesh lining in between the plastic etched posts along the fence. Tall, mighty bookshelves with actual information. Real authors. Real stories. Real enjoyment and excitement. Meanwhile, Dawn's hand planted itself on the smooth, textureless heavy-duty page. It wasn't the paper she knew and it wasn't the feeling she appreciated.

With a sad puff she kicked out her feet, laying out her legs straight. How long was she supposed to keep doing this? Maybe if it was something she actually wanted to read, she could bear with it, but being stuck like this...? Maybe if Katherine can change the rules, Dawn could try begging for a book to bring back...

But that was for later, and this was now. Now rightfully so, sucked. She blinked, finally noticing the odd one out in her peripherals. The moment she raised her head, the anomaly jerked itself out of view, though not without the whiplash of her straight hair waving out and back in.

Dawn quietly stared at the corner of the bookshelf for a moment longer. She was totally just being watched, wasn't she? Someone was staring at her? Then it clicked. The only person she knew of in this tiny reeducation camp hardly cared about any discretion... Dawn squeezed her legs a bit closer together.

Someone else was here, though. Someone that already sounded shy. Someone that Dawn didn't want to deal with. She stayed quiet, staring not for something, but because that's where her eyes last were. Miraculously, the girl peeked again, only now she did make a small yelp once eye contact with Dawn was unavoidable. Great. She *was* being watched. Where was Dayna? Couldn't she keep her away?

And to make matters worse, Dawn could already feel the tinge from needing to pee. Was this really how things were going to go? After an inward sigh, Dawn called out, "Kailey?" That's her name, right? "You don't have to keep hiding...?"

Immediately a switch was flipped.

Faster than her face could hide, Kailey's head shot out completely, and then some of her lower body too.

"You know my name?" Kailey asked loud and clear, like indoors and outdoors were the same to her.

Still sitting on the floor, Dawn blinked, not sure how to react. "...Uh...yeah. I heard it earlier..."

Maybe she had a poor choice of words, or her tone gave off the wrong vibe. Either way, Kailey fully stepped out from the shelf now, hiding her hands behind her back. Her shoulders shifted pensively as her feet in yellow buckle-strapped sandals pitter-pattered forward, finally stopping on a dime with just about a couple feet apart from them.

Then a finger from Kailey singled Dawn out completely, still hiding her other arm behind her back. With her pointing accusation she asked, "What's your name?"

"It's Dawn..." *When did I invite her to get so close?*

Apparently communication meant consent to this girl. The discomfort and awkwardness only grew once Kailey parked herself right where she stood. And in a moment of carelessness, the grown woman with her knees wide apart flashed what was between her legs, and it was an upsetting sight to see.

Underneath the yellow of her sundress was an unmistakable bulge of white; a pair of underwear that crinkled just like Dawn's, except this Little hardly seemed to mind. Finally she crossed her legs, but where her dress settled between her legs was where it could rest comfortably and conform around the slight bump.

"Whatcha doin'?" Kailey asked. Dawn almost thought she was being playful, like a lackadaisical friend, but no matter what she said, the much more modest of the two couldn't misplace the sincerity she seemed to have. She sounded innocent and careless, like...she wasn't all there. Almost like...

"Uh..." The unusual exchange was enough to make Dawn actually forget. She glanced down at her lap, reminding herself what was there. "Just...reading."

"What's it about? Is it about frogs?" her question came on a dime, and the second sentence made her eyes light up.

*Frogs? Why would she even ask about that?*

"No, it's...er..." What even was this supposed to be about? Well, as stated earlier, what it was "about" wasn't actually the case, so more aptly, what was it disguised as? "It's about...birds. Yeah." Birds getting ready for a big dinner with their hedgehog friends... How exciting.

Off in the distance Dawn could hear a couple more voices. Were more people showing up already?

“Oh.” Kailey answered quite simply. Clearly her interest had not been piqued. “My name’s Kailey! I like frogs!” she giggled, and Dawn nodded.

“Uhm...nice to meet you, Kailey. I’m Dawn...”

With their reintroductions finished, Kailey immediately started the next topic. “Why’re you here? My Mommy’s doing important research stuff, she said.”

“I’m here because...mine works here.”

“Your Mommy works here?!” Kailey exclaimed and rocked forward on her behind. Her head started to wander up to the ceiling as she looked around frantically, pointing out an empty rail in the ceiling. “Does she talk to the book robots?”

The more she heard, the more Dawn was quickly realizing this was the exact kind of person she didn’t want to run into. Another person like that kid– that former adult from down the street... Another victim. It hurt just to see and hear her...

“She helps fix them, I guess, yeah...” This woman was just a product of the world. She was part of what scared and angered Dawn so much. But as much of a product she was, so too was she a victim. “What...what does your owner do?” Sure she’d follow the rule to refer to Katherine as her mother, but no one said that she couldn’t afford her peers some form of dignity/?

“Owner?” Kailey tilted her head, then giggled, “That’s weird! My Mommy makes people not sick! She can fix anybody! One time, she fixed a boo-boo on my knee!” And with a demonstration, Kailey lifted her knee, hiking up her dress well enough to show her spotless knee, save for a little red tint. But of course, Dawn couldn’t not see her stylized diaper, covered in frogs and all. Certainly there was a pattern...

So her owner was a doctor? Interesting. Someone so successful would trouble themselves with enslaving another human being. For someone so committed to helping others, in what way did warping another person’s mind count for that?

“That’s cool,” Dawn tried to stay flexible, and avoid looking at her diaper. “So she works at a hospital?”

“Uhh...” Kailey hummed, sounding uncertain. “She...works atta place where people get better!”

“Ohh, okay,” Dawn nodded. *So...a hospital?*

“Do you have a Daddy?”

What was with the twenty questions? Dawn didn't want to do any thinking, nor did she feel like talking. She felt bad turning the woman away, but also not at the same time for the sake of herself.

“Uhm, Kailey?” Dawn scooped back against the shelf, just to stand herself back up. “It was nice meeting you, but uh...do you think I could have some privacy?”

“Huh? Why?”

Did she really need to explain social boundaries? To a woman clearly in her twenties...? In her twenties, but in diapers, too...

“I'm busy reading right now...and I can't really focus when we're talking... Do you mind?”

“Can I be quiet?” Kailey asked. Be quiet and stay.

And before Dawn answered, her bladder twinged again. Fuck. Why did she have to drink anything at all? Couldn't she just live off of air, just so she didn't have to take anything in and put anything out?

Cue the other noisy, energetic voices across the shelves. All of them, adults, more than likely, and that was enough to make Dawn even more unsettled.

“Don't you wanna go play with the...other people? I'm not really doing anything fun.”

“But Dayna said you'd wanna?”

And in a burst of disbelief, Dawn exclaimed, “What?” What did Dayna say?

“She...said...” and Kailey brought her hands together pensively. The amount and kind of emotion Dawn had used clearly caught the woman-toddler by surprise.

“W-wait, nevermind,” Dawn tried to dismiss the tension. “I was just surprised, is all. Thanks for telling me... But sorry, I'm not really looking to play.” Or hang out. Or socialize.

The girl's eyes were wandering anywhere but Dawn's face, too nervous to confront a basic misunderstanding. "Okay...are you mad at me?"

"No, I'm not mad. Just...can you please leave me alone?" However old Kailey was, it didn't change her attitude. It really was like a kid's. *Why* was she acting like a kid? Reason or not, dealing with an effective child, essentially shooing them away... It felt weird.

"Okay..." Kailey, quite dejected, stood herself up and waddled away, taking Dawn's less than satisfied mood with her, leaving her with something worse.

*Don't feel bad... It's better she stays involved with whatever sick fantasy she's been forced into... Better to keep to myself.* After all, none of this would last forever. It was all temporary. Absolutely. Without a doubt.

She went back to her book, finding happiness once more with being reunited with her loneliness. The "enjoyment" she was starting to get out of her reading was spotting the devices and traps that supposedly tricked people into believing what they wrote, or what they didn't. The birds went tweet-tweet. The cows went moo. Amazons were portrayed as some godlike figure, or the ex-machina that made everything all good again, at least in the stories that included humans.

Amazons seemed to be the solution. So. Many. Times. The resolution always led to relying on a giant somehow, or some higher power... Tell an "adult," or "get a grownup." Some were seemingly basic, while others came off as far more targeted.

Midway into her next skim, a shadow started to loom over her.

"What." Dawn, finding it far easier to tiptoe around her words with an Amazon, looked up at Dayna. The same person that was spewing lies at other Littles to try and get her to do something.

"Looks like you've been reading quite a bit!" she remarked with a smile.

"..." Dawn glanced over at her growing pile. "Yeah."

"What do you say we have a juice break?" Dayna said with a bottle already extended.

"Uh, no thanks. All good." Though her bladder wasn't. Not like she was telling that to Dayna, though.

"Mmm," a deliberate, disagreeing hum came from her caretaker, "How about we hydrate just a little bit, hon? Lots of liquids are important for kiddos like you!"



“No thanks, I’m fine,” Dawn repeated, and Dayna’s smile and demeanor didn’t budge.

“Dawn? I’d like you to have some juice, sweetie.”

And thinking better on it, the Little presented with a one-answer choice finally huffed, closing the boring book and finally accepted the bottle she wanted nothing to do with. It was a one-two punch, of course. One was more of a burden on her bladder, which was only becoming more uncomfortable. Two was the much more situational problem, which was...

“While you’re drinking that, how about you come over to the circle? We’re gonna start a story!” she tempted, and Dawn didn’t bite. Regardless, it meant having to leave her corner because now with a drink she didn’t ask for, it meant not being allowed to touch anything herself... How cruel.

“No. I’ll drink the juice, but I’m not interested.” And she promptly turned back for her seat. But before she could walk away, a hand hooked on her pants and diaper. Another surprise diaper check.

“*Hey!*” Dawn spun around with another mean look. “I *said* you didn’t have permission for that!”

“I think I do, sweetie. Your Mommy asked me to watch you while she’s at work. I’m checking everyone else? Don’t you want to stay clean too?”

“And I *will* be clean because I don’t piss myself!” In a moment of frustration, Dawn overstepped her verbiage.

“Dawn?” Dayna frowned, and Dawn stiffened. “Do I need to remind you about being on your best behavior? We said we were going to be good for Mommy today, weren’t we?”

*We* were going to be good? As far as Dawn was concerned, her end of the bargain was still being followed. Dayna? She was just being a bitch that had no business getting in the way of that! Really? Was she going to be the arbiter of whether Dawn did or did not get what she shouldn’t even need to earn?

“Fine!” Dawn huffed, marching forward and ahead of Dayna. No matter what though, this woman would undoubtedly be getting a poor review. Christ, complaining to Katherine about anything was barely even fifty-fifty. If she couldn’t stick up for herself, what recourse was there?!

She emerged into the clearing, the dreaded circle. Standing by the rocking chair she spotted Kailey again, only now she was giggling on her knees, busy with three other adult children. Two boys and one other girl. All fully matured. Muscles and breasts yet again. And just like those were a given, so too were the snug clothes for the boys that either showed off the white plastic waistbands sneaking through their shorts or the fully exposed diaper peeking from underneath a far too short skirt.

Not a single book between them was to be found, and instead what looked like action figures and dolls. Self-sourced toys? A gentle hand on her shoulder nudged Dawn forward and away from the chair, or the accursed throne where Dayna just sat.

“Okay, kids! Who’s ready for a story!”

And in a resounding cheer, all four Littles, Dawn excluded, yelped, “Meeeeee!!”

“Okay!” Dayna chuckled, still getting that same high all obedient Littles probably gave her. “Let’s make a circle! Criss-cross applesauce, everyone!”

“Dawn!” Kailey was quick to waddle-jog over to her, crinkling like a thunderstorm. The moment they came face to face, the difference in height came slightly in Kailey’s favor. Her smile was wide and her eyes were shining, overjoyed to see the one and only adult at heart again. “Can we sit together?”

“Oh! Did you make a friend, Dawn?” Dayna smiled from the rocking chair, and Dawn fought from making a dirty look. She damn well knew what she did.

Focusing back on Kailey, Dawn at this point didn’t have so much more to lose. For now. “Uh...yeah? Sure?”

An excited giggle came from the girl who didn’t hesitate in taking Dawn by the wrist. “I wanna sit on the circle!” she declared, and Dawn went confused while she was dragged over to a spot. Weren’t they already going to sit in the circle? Then her mature mind was able to look down one level lower once she realized how literal Kailey was being. *On* the circle. One of the circles patterned on the carpet...

The other Littles assembled on either end of them, but clearly Kailey had found them the best seats in the house. In the Learning Corner, in other words. Right in front of them now was Dayna, already grabbing the first large book off a high table right next to her.

“Okay, are we all comfy?” Dayna surveyed the small group. “Everyone ready?”

“Yeeessss!” Another cry in unison.

Dawn briefly turned her head out to the exit, where now she could see a few more strangers. Looking at books on faraway shelves. Doing things she actually wished for. And yet here she was, trapped with a bunch of other kids for story time.

“Okay... This story is called, ‘Jumping Jeremy’s Fun Day Out!’” Dayna slowly read the cover, and then with both hands she turned the book, showing the whole audience the front cover’s illustration.

Kailey’s hip knocked into Dawn’s as she bounced with glee.

In a loud voice she giggled excitedly, “Froggies!”

*Oh. Frogs are her favorite...*