

Chapter Five: In Your Bubble

Bringing the train to a complete halt, Layle opened an air pocket around the *Clown Car*.

KER-CHAKI THRUNCHI! Lucy fell on her way out, her eyes were still closed, she was still doin' that.

"Lucy! Are you alright? You don't gotta do this whole eyes thing, you really don't."

Layle helped her up.

"Yeah you're right, but the first memory I want is a happier you, even back there on the dock I could see something was up."

"You could?"

"Yeah." Lucy pointed at herself. "I'm gonna let you in on a little secret, every third Wednesday on a leap year, under the bright stars of a red moon I can see through muh fuckin' walls! Nothin' escapes these babies!"

"Hmmm, I'm not really sure where you are after that one. I'll have to run it by the commission, ya know since you're the joke police and all."

"Heh heh, shit maybe we're both just unfunny."

"Well both of us can be kind." Layle hesitated to grab Lucy's hand. "M-My hands are kinda bumpy. Ya know from the mosquitos and everything."

"They're your hands."

"Yeah..?"

"If they're your hands, then they're kind hands. If it makes you feel better, my hands are rough as shit." Layle looked down.

...These hands are disgusting...

"Woah your hands are so damn warm! Man I'm glad you're here, I'm weak to the cold."

"Lucy, your hands ice cold! Is it numb? I know it's a little chilly down here but this is crazy!"

"Yeahhh I'm pretty sure I got Raynaud's, buttttt, you're here with me so I should be good."

"Just to be extra safe I'll go get you a blanket and then we'll head inside."

...These hands are warm...

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The ocean's harmony had gone uninterrupted. **TUNGGG! TUNGGG!** Their footsteps echoed throughout the sunken naval ship Lay brought them to. The dark vessel had become the home to many sea creatures. They walked down a loooooong corridor and cut through a kitchen past some lantern fish.

“Yeah I was soooo nervous when I saw that you booked me, I was so in my head, so nervous, and I already kinda struggle with anxiety.” A few eel pouts swam by. “I’ve always been kind of an odd ball in my family, we have this farm and everyone got so mad at me for trying to pursue my own dreams. My mom still calls me to tell me how damn stupid I am.” A cookie cutter shark gnawed at some rusted metal. “She makes me feel like I’m still a little kid. I’m trying sooo hard to be something, to be the adult that she raised me to be. But since I’m not doing what she wants it just doesn’t matter!” Lay took them up a flight of stairs.

“Man fuck that, this is really cool, I think it’s just the advertisin’ part that’s fuckin’ you up. Is there anything I can do to help?”

“You don’t have to help, just having someone to talk to is more than enough for me.

Before right now the only person I could talk to was Carl.” They stood before a steel door overtaken by seaweed.

“Carl?” Lucy questioned.

“The *Clown Car* grows anemone when it submerges, he’s a clown fish that usually rides along with me.” **KREEENGI** “Hnnnnng!” Lay struggled to push the door open.

“Can y’all communicate?”

“Not really. He kinda just looks at me as I speak.” **KREEENGI** “Hnnnnng! We might have to take a detour, this door is too heavy, I think it got more rusted since the last time I was here.” She tried to walk off but Lucy didn’t budge.

“You like this door?”

“Not particularly?” Lucy held her hands out.

PUARI!

TUNGGGGG!

The entire ship vibrated. “Ahie!” Lay yelped as Lucy swept her off her feet. Breathing heavily she carried the fish lover into the darkness. “L-Lucy what’re you doing, open your eyes at least!”

Lucy held a finger up. “We’re gonna prove everyone above water wrong. This is like a litness test, so tell me where I need to go.”

“Uh, uh, turn left!” Lucy turned into a dorm room.

“We walkin’ by anythin’ cool?”

“A few snailfish and some shrimp.” Layle smiled “Snailfish are these kinda goey, slimy, gelatinous-looking things, they can come in a few colors. They’re almost like tadpoles and have big heads. Don’t get too close, they have spines and are carnivorous. I’d describe the shrimp, but the snailfish are eating them.”

“Alright! Let’s keep the train moving!” The duo delved deeper into the darkness. With all the breaks in the floor Lucy almost fell through, walls she slammed into, and seaweed she got

tangled in, Layle wasn't sure they'd make it. However, under some form of miracle the ladies made it to their destination.

The balcony.

Located just outside the captain's quarters, Lay's favorite reading spot was swarmed with warm orange blankets and pillows. "This one lives in Western Australia and can live up to forty years old and even beyond in some cases, assuming they aren't eaten that is. They taste great and grow to be huge so fishermen catch them all the time." Layle had pulled a large book from a treasure chest and read to the still *voluntarily* blinded Lucy. Each page was filled with high-quality sketches, paragraphs of information, and photographs of fish all over the world, all documented by the conductor herself.

"Man forty years is crazy, I wonder do fish go through midlife crises? You don't eat fish do you Layle?"

"No I couldn't, they've kept me company way too often, I don't get mad if other people do though, it's not my call to make."

"Nah I feel you. I wanna come with you when you make the next page, this book is so cool! What's like your creative process?"

It's kind of like a diary to me, something to do after a long day or to kill time."

"Ever thought about havin' it published?"

"Sometimes but I ge-."

BUH-DA-DA-DA-DING! BUH-DA-DA-DA-DING! BUH-DA-DA-DA-DING!

"...What does she want now?..." ***SQUEEZE!***

"That yer mom right?"

"...Y-Yeah..."

BUH-DA-DA-DA-DING! BUH-DA-DA-DA-DING! BUH-DA-DA-DA-DING!

Lucy leaned in. "Do you wanna pick it up?"

"Well...No...but she's my mom..."

"My brother says not to get in between family but," Lucy looked serious behind closed eyes. "What's the point in pickin' up just to get your feelings hurt? Has her being your mom ever stopped her from talkin' shit to you?"

BUH-DA-DA-DA-DING! BUH-DA-DA-DA-DING! BUH-DA-DA-DA-DING!

"...No..."

"I can't tell you what to do tho, something might've happened, and it's your decision to pick up or not, no matter what it is I'll still be sitting here. I guess the main thing is. You're an adult, you can do, or not do whatever you want to."

BUH-DA-DA-DA-DING! BUH-DA-DA-DA-DING! BUH-DA-DA-DA-DING!

She let it ring.

Layle cried

She cried

And cried,

And cried,

Through tears and sniffles, she said.

“I don’t want to.”

Lucy opened her eyes.

“That’s two now.”