

EXT. CLOUDSCAPE DREAM - DAY

The endless expanse of clouds is not quite that of reality, the sky just a touch too iridescent, and the clouds are all made out of little snails with white shells.

A teenage girl floats upward, listless but with a direction in mind. This is DAE. She reaches a spot not particularly distinguishable from everywhere else, and grabs the largest snail she can see.

DAE

I'm very sorry to bother you. Can I ask you a question?

Dae shakes the snail with a light urgency, belying her politeness. The snail has no reaction, because its cloud-like coloration and floating capabilities are the only things that differentiate it from a normal snail.

DAE (CONT'D)

I want to ask—and please answer honestly—would you say I am worth loving?(pausing)That is to say, not by you specifically, but just generally. Though perhaps not too generally, if you would be so kind, and in fact, to one person in particular would be great. Though I'd prefer not to disclose who, if it's all the same / to you

A figure burst through the snail clouds with an urgency that makes it clear they're following Dae. They are dressed like a 17th century clown, the sort that looks like a Faberge snowman. This is MOM. Her voice is projected from somewhere else.

MOM

Dae! We need to get going.

DAE

I'm still getting readyama.

Mom stares at the cloud snail in Dae's hands. Dae is still shaking it. Mom makes the choice to not point it out.

MOM

Uh, hurry if you can please, Dae.

DAE

Yep.

Dae turns back to the snail to continue shaking it, whispering her question at it again. Despite her efforts, Mom hears it anyway. Her expression crumples.

MOM

Dae... didn't we talk about this yesterday?

DAE

Your response was satisfactory... I'm just seeking a wider data pool.

MOM

Did you take your meds this morning?

DAE

...Wider (to snail) and more handsome. Please answer me.

MOM

Dae, please...

Mom grabs Dae by the armpits, like a misbehaved cat, pulling her away from the snail cloud. Dae can feel the threads of unreality beginning to unravel. She is not ready.

The clouds part, revealing a massive crystalline bubble, opalescent in refracting the sky's many colors. THE BUBBLE BEAST. It is simply colossal. Cruise ship compared to human.

BUBBLE

HALT.

Mom releases Dae, flinging herself between Dae and The Bubble Beast. Dae shows none of the same precaution. She leans out from behind Mom, addressing the bubble.

DAE

Who are you?

BUBBLE

I am The Bubble Beast. Scion of The sphere. Successor of the Soapiest.

DAE  
You seem plenty cool.

MOM  
(quietly scolding)  
Dae! Don't talk to it!

BUBBLE  
(to Dae)  
I agree.

DAE  
I don't know what you're supposed to be  
though. Am I taking a bubble bath?

BUBBLE  
I despise baths.

MOM  
(to Dae)  
You haven't taken a bath since you were  
11.

DAE  
(to Mom)  
They're unsanitary.

BUBBLE  
I agree.

DAE  
It's nice to be among like-minded  
people.

MOM  
Dae...

After a moment's pause, Dae drifts closer to the bubble. Mom does not follow her, though it seems more like the clown is not able to move at all.

Her voice becomes fainter the closer Dae gets to the bubble. All Dae can hear is its resonating wibble wobble. At this distance, she can see the very small pelican at the very center of it.

DAE  
You are very small.

BUBBLE

I have traded size for bubble. It is the greatest of my many great decisions.

On closer inspection, Dae can see that it is hardly a pelican at all. It is a sea bird in the loosest of terms, shrunken and warped beyond recognition.

It does not fly, suspended by some other means. Its bill is the size of a toothpick, its lungs mere edamame within a lice comb ribcage, its neck pouch more akin to a wrinkle.

BUBBLE (CONT'D)

Do you see what I have given away? I am sure not a single one of my kin would recognize me now. They would not understand. My wings beat no longer. My heart is much the same.

DAE

...I would see a doctor.

BUBBLE

No! It was a pardonable expense. My bubble now, is unsurpassable. Can you not see it, child? I am the purest form of sea bird, the epitome of pelican. Stripped of all weakness. Unmade, yet ever-remaining. I am... invulnerable.

DAE

At least you seem to feel you've gotten your money's worth.

BUBBLE

Yes. I have elevated myself beyond the likes of you and your little clown. Nothing can touch me. Even in approaching me, you have only shortened our distance by mere trivialities. Can you even comprehend the extent to which we differ? I cannot even recall the last time I felt pain.

DAE

I stubbed my toe really hard this morning and cried for 20 minutes, although around the five minute mark it wasn't that much about my toe anymore.

BUBBLE

How utterly pitiable. I hope you consider a different path in life, for your own sake. I recommend a bubble.

Dae considers it, but not too hard. He is crazy, with no friends. She looks back at Mom, a tiny spot in the distance. Dae cannot hear whatever she must be saying.

She understands, for a moment, the undeniable sort of safety in not being able to hear the certainly troubling things the clown must be saying. She turns back to the pelican.

DAE

Say, do you think I am worth loving?

BUBBLE

I don't think the pursuit of love is worth it at all.

DAE

Well, that's a new one.

BUBBLE

Such poisonous things cannot enter my bubble. Nothing is worth the bubble, except me.

DAE

Please put yourself in my shoes. Bubble-less. Am I worth loving?

BUBBLE

Frankly, your main priority should be your lack of bubble. My point remains. Love is not worth you. I am sure you will not find a single benefit in it.

DAE

It hasn't been very beneficial for me lately, yes.

The Bubble Beast is pleased by her response. By some means unknown to man or bird, it approaches her within the bubble.

It arrives at the bubble's edge, floating before her, and in its barely distinguishable eyes is a sort of glee.

BUBBLE

It never will be, child. You and I are a unique breed. Incomparable.

DAE

I'm sure I can find it within myself to be flattered.

BUBBLE

Better you don't. Flattery cannot enter my bubble.

DAE

I'll withhold, then.

BUBBLE

Yes! That is very good, you are doing very good. You see, within us is an incredible talent. I can see in you the potential for a bubble only slightly lesser than my own.

DAE

As in, I have one?

BUBBLE

As in you can make one! It will be the greatest thing you have ever done. You will live a life free of all strife and upset.

DAE

That does sound pretty nice.

BUBBLE

It is a superior existence to that of the fickle pelicans sloshing across the bank!

DAE

I a little bit already considered myself a higher life form than them, no offense. I get what you mean though.

The Bubble Beast does not seem to hear Dae's words, lost in the wake of its own fervor.

BUBBLE

They are doomed for a life filled with struggle. With pain. What awaits them is only misery. What a miserable existence.

Dae flicks a glance back at Mom, still in the same place.

DAE

Uh, hold on a second.

BUBBLE

They do not deserve these heights, such spectacles of vulnerability, bound for its inevitable consequences. It will hurt when they grovel, begging to be let in.

The pelican twitches and shakes, its voice starting to break up with something indistinguishable.

BUBBLE (CONT'D)

And it will hurt more when I turn them away. I hope it feels like they are shriveling away, becoming nothing.

DAE

You're losing me. I don't understand.

BUBBLE

But you do, don't you? Don't you want this? Isn't it great? They are mere flecks to me, you see. They will feel the glut of tribulations that you and I have so expertly avoided, WE ARE UNTOUCHABLE.

Dae turns to look at her mother, but she is not there. The clown is gone. It is so quiet. There is only her left. It is so quiet.

It might be safer here. Surely, it cannot be. Is she willing to risk it?

The Bubble Beast speaks, and it sounds almost like Dae.

BUBBLE (CONT'D)

ISN'T IT SAFER? ISN'T IT BETTER? IT IS SO QUIET. WE ARE UNTOUCHABLE. The little pelicans will die alone. They will despair, and I will feel nothing. She will regret it, and I won't bat an eye. SHE WILL NOT BE HAPPY WITHOUT ME. SHE WILL ABANDON ME FOR HER STUPID BOYFRIEND AND WHEN HE DUMPS HER HIS PRACTICE WILL STOP TAKING OUR INSURANCE AND SHE'LL HAVE TO PAY FOR MY BRACES OUT OF POCKET AND SHE'S GOING TO CRY AND I WON'T CARE AT ALL. STUPID STUPID STUPID SHE'S SO STUPID SHE DOESN'T LOVE ME

Dae stares at the little pelican, tears cleaving down its face in stark black lines. She did not know pelicans could wear mascara, and she can't remember putting on mascara.

Dae hurts unbearably. Her lungs are tight. Her nose is raw. The pelican is still making noise, but she can't distinguish them from squawks.

Dae watches the broken thing as it throws all of itself into each of its shouts. Stupid, it says. Stupid, stupid stupid. So many times it'd stopped sounding like a word.

DAE

Who's stupid? Mom?

There is a lot to be said for Dae's mental state, but there is not a single world where she would watch her mother be insulted in front of her.

DAE (CONT'D)

Hey, shut up.

The pelican is still screaming. All she feels is angry. Stupid pelican. Her fists ball up.



DAE (CONT'D)

You mentioned something about wings,  
right?

Dae does not wait for a response. She plants a fist straight into the bubble. The thin veneer separating her and The Bubble Beast snaps.

The pelican goes completely silent for an instant, before it begins to fall. It flails, pinching the end of her pant leg with its flimsy beak. Dae falls with it. They scream all the way down.

BUBBLE

YOU! WHAT HAVE YOU DONE! YOU HAVE  
KILLED US! YOU STUPID LITTLE PELICAN!  
YOU ARE NOTHING LIKE ME!

DAE

I DON'T WANT TO BE!

They fall at meteoric speeds, the squirming mass of a bird somehow still attached to her.

A figure bursts out from the snail clouds, making impact with Dae. It sounds like a door being slammed open. The pelican is dislodged with a grunt as it continues its descent.

Mom and Dae topple through the snails with only momentum. Mom's arms are wrapped firmly around Dae. They slow down at last, heaving, snails scattered in their wake.

DAE (CONT'D)

Mom...

Mom presses her lips against Dae's forehead, slowing adrenaline sharp in her trembling fingers.

MOM

Dae, can we come back down to earth  
now?

Dae shrugs, an acquiescing thing. She closes her eyes and sinks into her mother's arms. They are both quiet for a long while.

MOM (CONT'D)

...Do you still want to go?

DAE

My mascara is ruined.

Mom strokes a hand across Dae's cheek. Dae keeps her eyes closed.

MOM

Dae, honey, you aren't wearing any.

DAE

Maybe it's better I don't go. I'm not sure he'll like me.

MOM

He thinks your teeth are great.

DAE

I was thinking more personally.

MOM

Right, sorry. (beat) You don't have to go, if you don't want to. But I would love it if you did.

Dae opens her eyes at last, looking away from her mother at the walls of her room.

MOM (CONT'D)

And for the record, you're not the one on trial here. (running a hand through Dae's hair) All that matters is that you like him. (beat) Would you mind making an appearance, your honor?

Dae hums abashedly, but nods. Her eyes are focused on a painting of the ocean on her wall, containing a frankly very ugly baby pelican surrounded by larger ones.

It is being offered some food. It's unclear whether it is angry about it, or if its face just looks like that.

DAE

I'm taking that thing down. (turning to mom) And I did take my meds. (beat) Also, if he's mean to you, I'll rip my braces off.

MOM

Please don't.