

# feed

M. T. Anderson

*To all those who resist the feed*

—M. T. A.

• • •

“O dear white children casual as birds,  
Playing among the ruined languages,  
So small beside their large confusing words,  
So gay against the greater silences  
Of dreadful things you did . . .”

—from “Anthem for St. Cecilia’s Day,”

W. H. Auden

Part I

**M O O N**

your face  
is not  
an organ

We went to the moon to have fun, but the moon turned out to completely suck.

We went on a Friday, because there was shit-all to do at home. It was the beginning of spring break. Everything at home was boring. Link Arwaker was like, "I'm so null," and Marty was all, "I'm null too, unit," but I mean we were all pretty null, because for the last like hour we'd been playing with three uninsulated wires that were coming out of the wall. We were trying to ride shocks off them. So Marty told us that there was this fun place for lo-grav on the moon. Lo-grav can be kind of stupid, but this was supposed to be good. It was called the Ricochet Lounge. We thought we'd go for a few days with some of the girls and stay at a hotel there and go dancing.

We flew up and our feeds were burbling all sorts of things about where to stay and what to eat. It sounded pretty fun, and at first there were lots of pictures of dancing and people with romper-gills and metal wings, and I was like, *This will be big, really big*, but then I guess I wasn't so skip when we were flying over the surface of the

moon itself, because the moon was just like it always is, after your first few times there, when you get over being like, *Whoa, unit! The moon! The goddamn moon!* and instead there's just the rockiness, and the suckiness, and the craters all being full of old broken shit, like domes nobody's using anymore and wrappers and claws.

The thing I hate about space is that you can feel how old and empty it is. I don't know if the others felt like I felt, about space? But I think they did, because they all got louder. They all pointed more, and squeezed close to Link's window.

You need the noise of your friends, in space.

I feel real sorry for people who have to travel by themselves. In space, that must suck. When you're going places with other people, with this big group, everyone is leaning toward each other, and people are laughing and they're chatting, and things are great, and it's just like in a commercial for jeans, or something with nougat.

To make some noise, Link started to move his seat up and back to whack Marty's knees. I was like trying to sleep for the last few minutes of the flight because there was nothing to see except broken things in space, and when we're going hard I get real sleepy real easy, and I didn't want to be null for the unettes on the moon, at the hotel, if any of them were youch.

I guess if I'm honest? Then I was hoping to meet someone on the moon. Maybe part of it was the loneliness of the craters, but I was feeling like it was maybe time to hook up with someone again, because it had been a couple months. At parties, I was starting to get real lonely, even when there were other people around me, and it's worse when you leave. Then there's that silence when you're driving home alone in the upcar and there's nothing but the feed telling you, *This is the music you heard. This is the music you missed. This is what is new.*

Listen. And it would be good to have someone to download with. It would be good to have someone in the upcar with you, flying home with the lights underneath you, and the green faces of mothers that you can see halfway through the windows of dropping vans.

As we flew across the surface of the moon, I couldn't sleep. Link was playing with the seat like an asshole. He was moving it forward and backward. Marty had dropped his bird, these fake birds that were the big spit and lots of people had them, and Marty's bird was floating off, because there was hardly any gravity, and whenever he leaned out to get his bird, Link would slam his seat back like meg hard and it would go bam on Marty's face, and they would start laughing. Marty would be all, "Unit! Just wait one—" and Link would be, "Go for it. Try! Try it!" and Marty would be like, "Unit! You are so—!" And then they would be all big laughing and I felt like a complete bonesprocket for trying to sleep when there was fun. I kept hoping the waitress lady would say something and make them shut up for a minute, but as soon as we got out of Earth's gravitational zone she had gone all gaga over the duty-free.

I didn't want to be sleepy and like all stupid, but I had been drinking pretty hard the night before and had been in mal and I was feeling kind of like shit. So it was not a good way to start this whole trip to the moon, with the seat thumping on Marty's face, and him going, "Unit! I'm trying to get my bird!"

Link was saying, "Go for it."

Marty went, "Linkwhacker! Shit! You're like doing all this meg damage to my knees and my face!"

"Kiss the chair. Pucker up."

They both started laughing again. "Okay," said Marty. "Okay, just tell me which of my frickin' organs you're going to smash this time."

"Keep your tray in the upright position."

"Like what organ? Just tell me."

"Those aren't organs."

"What do you mean?"

"Your face is not an organ."

"My face is too an organ. It's alive."

"Omigod, is there enough oxygen?" said our friend Calista. "Because are you having some kind of neuron death?"

"I'm trying to sleep," Loga complained. She yawned. "I'm flat-lining. Meg."

Then there was this *wham* and Marty was all, "Oh, shit," holding on to his face, and I sat up and was like completely there was no hope of sleeping with these morons doing rumpus on my armrest.

The waitress came by and Link stopped and smiled at her and she was like, *What a nice young man*. That was because he purchased like a slop-bucket of cologne from the duty-free.

## impact

So I was tired and pissy from the get-go.

When we got off the ship, our feeds were going fugue with all the banners. The hotels were jumping on each other, and there was bumff from like the casinos and mud slides and the gift shops and places where you could rent extra arms. I was trying to talk to Link, but I couldn't because I was getting bannered so hard, and I kept blinking and trying to walk forward with my carry-on. I can't hardly remember any of it. I just remember that everything in the banners looked goldy and sparkling, but as we walked down to the luggage, all the air vents were streaked with black.

The whole time was like that. The moon went on and on. It was me and Marty and Link and Calista and Loga and Quendy. The three girls had one room at the hotel, and the three of us boys had another room. There were a lot of people there for the break, and kids were all leaping up and down the halls and making their voices echo. It was a pretty crummy hotel, and there weren't enough sheets, and there was hardly any gravity, and no one had



a fake ID so they put a lock on the minibar. I was like, "This is a crummy hotel," but Marty was all, "Unit, this is where I stayed last time. It's like meg cheap, and all the staff are made from a crystalline substance."

Our feeds were clear again from all the moon banners, so for a long time we all watched the football game while the girls, they did something else on the feed. They were chatting each other and we couldn't hear them, but they kept laughing and touching each other's faces. I wanted to go to sleep, but every time I tried, *bam!* Link and Marty would suddenly go all fission on me, saying, "Titus! Did you fuckin' see that? Did you see Hemmacher?" I tried to tell myself that being here was not re: sleeping but re: being with your friends and doing great stuff. I tried to concentrate on all the stimulus, and the fun, all of it.

There was not always too good fun, though. We ordered some fancy nutrient IVs from room service but they gave us all headaches, and we went out to this place that Marty said served the best electrolyte chunkies but it had closed a year before. It was dinnertime, so we had dinner at a J. P. Barnigan's Family Extravaganza, which was pretty good, and just like the one at home. We got some potato skins for appetizers. It was at least good to get out of the hotel, because most of the rest of the city had pretty good artificial gravity, so if you dropped things, at least they fuckin' fell. It was almost like normal, which is how I like it.

Then we went back to the hotel. There were parties there, but it was mostly college kids. Usually we can get in, because me and Link and Marty and Calista, we can turn on the charm. Calista is blond and she can do this sorority-girl ice-princess thing, which she does with her voice and her shoulder blades, which makes people think she's older than she is and really important. Link is tall

and butt-ugly and really rich, that kind of old rich that's like radiation, so that it's always going *deet deet deet deet* in invisible waves and people are suddenly like, "Unit! Hey! Unit!" and they want to be guys with him. Marty, his thing is that he's good at like anything, any game, and I just stand there silent and act cool, and we're this trio, the three of us guys, being like, total guys, which usually makes people let us in and give us beer.

That didn't work this time. We tried to get in and we were standing in the doorway and they were all, "Who the hell are you?"

We looked at ourselves. We all looked kind of bad. We looked tired and sleepy, and even though we're all pretty good-looking, except Link, we were all pale and our hair was greasy. We had the lesions that people were getting, and ours right then were kind of red and wet-looking. Link had a lesion on his jaw, and I had lesions on my arm and on my side. Quendy had a lesion on her forehead. In the lights of the hallway you could see them real good. There are different kinds of lesions, I mean, there are lesions and lesions, but somehow our lesions, in this case, seemed like kid stuff.

Later after some showers we went to the Ricochet Lounge. It was very lo-grav/no-grav, and it was all about whamming one person into another in big stuffed suits. The place had been hip, like, a year and a half ago. The slogan was "Slam the Ones You Love!" Now the place just looked old and sad. The walls were all marked up from people hitting them.

Even with his impact helmet on, Link stood out. He's much taller than anyone else, because he's part of a secret patriotic experiment. In the low gravity, his arms seemed like they were everywhere. He swung them around and spun. I was being a little careful when I ran into other

people, because of the arm lesion. It had broke open and it was oozing. Still, it was pretty fun at first, launching ourselves off the walls and going like vvvvvvvvvvvvv and hitting other people and wrestling while floating to the floor.

I was watching Loga real close. She and I had gone out about six months before, until we had this big argument. Then it was this big thing. She was like, *I never want to see you again*, and I was like, *Fine. Okay? Fine. Then get some special goggles*. But now we were friends, which was good. I think it's always really limp, when guys can't talk to girls they went out with. Plus, I was thinking that maybe Loga and I could hook up again, if we didn't find anyone else, like on the moon or whatev.

I didn't have a thing for Calista or Quendy or even completely a thing (anymore) for Loga. But I was watching Link slamming into them, and when he slammed, it said that he and the girls all knew what each other's bodies would be like, and that was part of the game.

I was unhappy because Loga and I had been a diad, and now when I ran into her at high speeds it wasn't anything like when Link ran into her at high speeds. I thought she and I should have a little secret way of collision. But usually we sailed right past each other.

Marty, who can do anything good, he was off in a corner doing these gymnastics in midair. He had a ball and he was somehow kicking it in a circle so it came back to his foot. Link said, "Over here," and Marty popped the ball to him, and he kicked it to me.

For a while we played a game with the ball, and we were twirling all over the place, and we were like, what it's called when you skim really close over the surface of something, we were that to the floor, with our arms out, but of course Marty started winning all the time, and Link, who doesn't like to lose, was like, "This is null. This sucks."

"Pass," said Marty. "What's fuckin' doing?"

"That this place sucks," said Link.

Marty said, "Give it a chance, unit."

But Link was like, "No. Play by yourself. Play with yourself," and suddenly everything seemed really stupid.

And then I saw someone watching. I wasn't glad. I looked again.

She was the most beautiful girl, like, ever.

She was watching our stupidity.

There was a valve that led into the food bar. She was in the valve. She had her crash helmet under her arm. She had this short blond hair. Her face, it was like, I don't know, it was beautiful. It just, it wasn't the way—I guess it wasn't just the way it looked like, but also how she was standing. With her arm. I just stared at her. I was getting some meg feed on the food bar and the pot stickers were really cheap.

I stood there wondering what it was that made her so beautiful. She was looking at us like we were shit.

Her spine. Maybe it was her spine. Maybe it wasn't her face. Her spine was, I didn't know the word. Her spine was like . . . ?

The feed suggested "supple."

o o o

... attracted to its powerful T44 fermion lift with vertical rise of fifty feet per second—and if you like comfort, quality, and class, the supple upholstery and ergonomically designed dash will leave you something like hysterical. But the best thing about it is the financing—at 18.9% A.P.R. . . .

o o o

... ONLY ON SPORTS-VOX—TAKE A MAN, TAKE A GAS SLED, TAKE A CHLORINE STORM ON JUPITER—AND BOYS, IT'S TIME TO SPIT INTO THE WIND WITH ALEX NEETHAM, THE HARDEST, HIPPEST, HYPEST . . .

o o o

... month's summer styles, and the word on the street is "squeaky." . . .

o o o

... their hit single "Bad Me, Bad You":

"I like you so bad  
And you like me so bad.  
We are so bad . . .  
It would be bad  
If we did not get together, baby,  
Bad baby,  
Bad, bad baby.  
Meg bad." . . .

o o o

... *Hostess M's American Family Restaurants.*  
*Where time seems to stop while you chew.®*

o o o

## juice

I followed her when I could.

She was sitting in the snack bar now, with her back to the valve. She was all clipped into the seat so she wouldn't float away if she jerked. I bought a snack. It was chocolate mousse in a tube. I hung on to the counter with one hand.

I watched her through my underarm. She was sitting there, with her slamsuit off now and in a bundle. Her helmet was on a hook next to her. I took a slug of tube mousse. I looked back over at her.

She was wearing a dress of gray wool. It wasn't plastic, and the light didn't reflect off it. Wool. Gray wool. Black stockings.

Her shoulders were like, all bent in, as if she didn't want anyone to be looking at her. She was just sitting, clipped in.

The others came through the valve behind me. I kept my head low. I didn't want them to be like, *Hey, unit, hey, hey, Titus, what's doin?* and then she'd look at me. She would be disturbed. Luckily, they came in and immediately Link and Marty started doing these gymnastics, and

they got in trouble, so I could stay watching her without them being a mob on me. This guy, he was from the club, he was yelling at them because they kept bouncing in the snack bar, which was off-bounds for still bouncing.

Behind the girl in gray was a big window and you could see we were in a bubble way high up over the moon. Down on the ground, tourists were riding big proteins across the craters. All the stars were out.

The guy was still yelling at the others over by the valve. He was all, *da da da be removed from the premises, da da da, express instructions, da da.*

I lowered my head, and turned it toward the girl in gray.

When she thought no one was looking, she opened her mouth. Something trembled there. Juice. She had filled her mouth with juice.

*Da da da, liability, da da da, think you're doing.*

I shifted. I watched the juice. For her own amusement, she was letting it go, gentle and sexy.

She just opened her mouth and pushed it out with her tongue. The juice came out of her lips as if it was being extracted real careful by a rock-star dentist who she loved. Her eyes were barely open, and it came out in lo-grav/no-grav as a beautiful purple wobble.

It hung in front of her, her juice. It stayed inches from her face. Her tongue was close behind it, perched in the air like a pink slug gargoye.

With her eyes almost shut, she watched traces on the drink's round surface swirl.