

## the nose grid

Link whispered at my side, "This so big sucks."

"This place doesn't suck," said Marty. "It's good."

"Maybe," said Calista, "if there were certain people who didn't go jumping on people's heads near the snack bar, if there weren't those people, then maybe we wouldn't all be standing here having a big shame banquet."

Marty was getting angry that everyone was like turding on his recommendation, and I just wanted them all to shut up somehow, I mean nicely, because suddenly I realized that we didn't really sound too smart. If someone overheard us, like that girl, they might think we were dumb.

I was playing with the magnets on my boots and trying not to look at her. I didn't want her to feel my eyes before I made my move. I was careful. Quendy and Loga went off to the bathroom because hairstyles had changed.

Marty drifted around and made slit-eyes at Link. Link and I were chatting about the girl, like I was going, *She is meg youch*, and he was going, *What the hell's she wearing?*, and I was going, *Wool. It's wool. Like from an animal*, and then Calista did her own chat to us, which was, *If you want*

to hear about an animal, what about two guys staring with their mouths wide open so they look completely Cro-Magnon?

That shut us up, and we stared out the window. Wrappers were turning through space like birds.

Quendy came back from the bathroom and said, "Omigod! Like big thanks to everyone for not telling me that my lesion is like meg completely spreading."

"Hon," said Calista, "it's not spreading."

"Omigod! It is going to be like larger than my whole head! I am going to need a hat just to have all this lesion. It will like go onto the brim."

"Exercise the breath," said Link. "Nobody cares about a stupid lesion."

"How can you not?" said Quendy. "It's huge, and it's right on my forehead. It's like *bonnnng!*" She trembled her hands around the lesion like it was a kind of lesion gong.

Loga went, "No one will notice."

"If they don't know you," Marty said, "they're not going to know what you normally look like."

"Oh, so they think that usually my like forehead is like weeping?"

"Ask her," said Link. He pointed to the girl in gray.

He said, "Miss, I wonder if you would, could you look at this girl and tell me if you notice anything?"

The girl turned around and looked at Quendy. She said, "The lesion isn't bad."

Quendy's hands were out in a *please*. "You saw it! See? Like, how far is the air lock?"

"Hon," said Calista. "Listen to the girl."

The girl said, "I've been thinking, because of my neck."

The girl's lesion was beautiful. It was like a necklace. A red choker.

"The face," said the girl, "is a grid. The two big imaginary lines are one down the center of the face and one

just across the top of the cheeks. This is my theory, anyway. The nose is where those lines intersect. The more a lesion interferes with those lines, the more noticeable it is. See, the hardest lesion to carry off is one on the nose itself. In your case, you have this lesion which is entirely on the edge of this one quadrant. That's not going to matter. It's not on a line." She unclipped herself and reached up with both her hands and touched her thumbs together, and made football goalposts around Quendy's face. "Framing. See? Your lesion, it's on the *edge* of your face, so it *frames* your face. It draws attention to your face. The good grid. See, you have this great grid. I'm probably saying way too much."

We were all kind of stunned.

"Yeah," said Calista, sounding confused. "She's right. It just frames your face."

The girl in gray touched her own lesion with a napkin. She said, "I want mine to go all the way around. I want it to be like a necklace, but right now, it's just a torque."

We were all just kind of staring at her like she was an alien. She smiled. We kept staring at her.

"There are times you just want to sink through the floor," she said, "but then you realize there's no air out there."

"Hey," said Marty. "I got a lesion on my foot. You want to see it?"

She smiled sweetly. "No, not really," she said.

Link pointed at his face and was like, "Hey, what about my lesion? Look at this puppy. It bleeds sometimes. You like this?"

She smirked. "Oh, mmm-hm," she said. "You put the 'supper' back in 'suppuration.'"

Link thought that was hilarious. Of course, he didn't have any idea what the hell she was talking about either,

but he started laughing while the rest of us were still looking up "suppuration" on the feed English-to-English wordbook.

She was now completely youch on all of our meters, except with the girls, who I could tell had started to chat each other like some ants after someone's buried a missionary alive in the middle of their hill. On the one hand, I thought she was the most amazing person I had ever seen in my life, even if she was weird as shit. On the other hand, I was pretty disappointed she was skeezing this sexy talk with Link Arwaker, who women for some reason always go for, in spite of the fact that he's a meg asshole to them, for example a slurpy question about, "Oh, what about my lesion? Let's talk more about me and my open sores."

Marty was trying to make up lost ground by saying, "Maybe you could change the bandages on my foot," but that was clearly just disgusting to everyone. We were all like, "Unit, no one wants to see your damn foot," and, "Jesus, Marty unit, stow the mess-hole."

Link was asking her, "Who are you? Where do you come from?"

And then she looked at me. Just at me, and I knew she was wondering what I thought about the guys and seductiveness and skeeze and all. She was waiting for me to say something, to see if I was going to skeeze like Marty and Link. I wondered whether she wanted me to skeeze. She seemed really smart from what she said, and she was pretty, and I was still thinking about that globe of juice floating in front of her face. I was still thinking about the beauty of how that juice had been born delicately from her lips, how it had been born whole, and how her tongue stood there afterward to see the juice make its trembling progress into the world.



But I had nothing to say.

She and the girls spent the rest of the hour fixing Quendy's hair to like showcase the lesion. Usually, Quendy is just like a kind of broken, little economy model of Calista, and she knows that, and feels real bad about it. But when this girl helped her, it wasn't like that. Quendy was the center of everyone for a long time.

That was why I kept looking at the girl in gray, and started to want, more than anything else that night, to be with her.

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... based on the true story of a clone fighting to save her own liver from the cruel and ruthless original who's farming her for organs.

"Nature . . . vs. Nurture." A Primus prime-time feedcast event.

Image of a girl weeping on a courtroom floor. "I am not Girl Number Two! Please, Judge Spandex! I'm also Number One! I'm not a product, but a person!"

Image of a girl holding a blaster to a twin's temple.  
"Remember, bitch. You can't spell 'danger' without DNA."

Blam.

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... the cola with the refreshing taste of citrus and butter . . .

◦ ◦ ◦

... an adventure in slouching . . .

◦ ◦ ◦

Calculon. New solutions for . . .

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o o o

... It's dance. It's dance, dance, dance. That's fun. Fun's fun, and fun's what you can have. There's nothing to stop you from fun. Do you see the bodies? Can you smell the beat? Then you'll come and roar with us. Come and throw your boots at superstars. Come thrash in the cool until your head opens up, and you see the veins of the people you love bright as branches against the sky, and burnt in your brain will be the fun, all of the fun, and the lights, and the Doppler fade of screaming you heard at the Rumble Spot. The Rumble Spot.

*The Rumble Spot: an ocean of chaos in the Sea of Tranquillity.*

o o o

Images of Coke falling in rivulets down chiseled mountainsides; children being held toward the sun; blades slicing grass; a hand, a hand extended toward the lemonade like God's at Creation; boys in Gap tees shot from a rocket; more lining up with tin helmets; Nike grav-gear plunging into Montana; a choir of Jamaican girls dressed in pinafores and strap-on solar cells; dry cleaners ironing the cheek prostheses of the rich; friends clutching at birds made of alloys; law partners jumping fences; snow; altitude; tears; hugs; night.

o o o

the moon  
is in the  
house of boring

She was on the moon all alone. Here it was, spring break, and she was on the moon, where there was all this meg action, and she was there without friends. She said she just walked through the crowds and watched, and she saw all these great things that way. She said she was there to observe.

There were crowds in the domes at night, spraying Gatorade from hoses, and all these college guys without shirts lifting their arms. There was a beetle that walked through the lanes and gave out prizes, which seemed really good, but she said that really, the prizes, they were kind of shitty when you looked at them close-up, because sometimes parts weren't included. She saw pools filled with foam.

Her name was Violet.

We asked her to come with us. We wanted to go to sleep by then, but we were on the moon, even if it sucked, and it was spring break, you know, with the action, so there was no way we were admitting we wanted to go to sleep. We told her we were thinking about going to some club called the Rumble Spot that we'd heard about on the feed.



"I don't know," she said.

But I was like, "You got to go. You can go and, you know, observe."

Marty said, "It will be a, a, you know, fuckin', it will . . ." He kind of wiggled his hand.

"Since you put it that way," she said, kind of fresh. Calista laughed. Suddenly I knew Calista was either going to love her or hate her.

After we were walking for a few minutes, it was, on the scale, maybe closer to hate, because Marty and Link and I were all walking around Violet and asking her all these questions, and she was asking us stuff, and we were telling her, and I don't think the other girls really were too skip about walking behind us.

Link said he wanted to get cranked before we went, and he said was there any place where we could drink without IDs? Marty said he knew of this one place, which was called Sombrero Dot, and he went there before with his cousin. He said it wasn't too out-of-the-way.

We got there and it had been torn down. They had built a pretty nice stucco mall there, so Loga and Quendy said we should go in and buy some cool stuff to go out in. That seemed good to us. I wanted to buy some things but I didn't know what they were. After we walked around for a while, everything seemed kind of sad and boring so we couldn't tell anymore what we wanted. Our feeds tried to help, and as we were walking around we were getting all the prices of things, but really the only thing that I wanted to get was a pair of infrared knee bands, and I could get better ones off the feed, and have them sent to my house, than in the stupid physical moon stores. Quendy bought some shoes, but the minute she walked out of the store she didn't like them anymore. Marty couldn't think of anything he wanted, so he ordered

this really null shirt. He said it was so null it was like ordering nothing.

Now it was even later and we wanted to go to the club, but we hadn't got drunk yet, so Link said maybe we could take a cab to the hotel and break into the minibar.

As we were driving through the tube streets, there was all of this commotion because of the protests about the moon. There were all these kids, what my dad calls Euro-trash, and they were standing in the middle of the square and broadcasting to everyone all these slogans, and it was hard not to receive, because they were so angry, but the cab drove right by them, and they didn't stop us. They were protesting all these things, some of them even were protesting the feed. They were like shouting, "Chip in my head? I'm better off dead! Chip in my head? I'm better off dead!" Loga rolled her eyes and was like, "Omigod."

We got back to the hotel. Kids were running down the halls with their fake birds. The fake birds were still in style. It was stupid, because the birds didn't even fly or sing or anything.

We went to the girls' bedroom and started to assault the minibar. I wanted to break it open quickly, because Violet was looking like she wasn't having fun. She was sitting all stiff on the bed.

"Just a sec," I said.

She nodded, but it was kind of polite.

Calista was whispering to Link, "What's her problem?"

We tried the minibar first with a comb, then with kicking. We threw it against the wall, which wasn't as hard to do with almost no gravity.

"You broke off a . . . a thing," said Marty. "You broke off a fuckin' thing."

"A caster," I said.

"Caster," said Link, pointing at my nose. "Good one."

You know your break sucks when the most brag part of the night is you coming up with the word "caster."

Violet was just sitting on the bed, playing with her thumb. Her shoulders were droopy and her feet were turned in. In fact, all the girls looked kind of on suspend. Calista and Loga were staring into space, watching something on the feed.

"Fuck," said Link, kicking the minibar. "I want to get weasel-faced."

"There's no way you're getting weasel-faced," I said. "Let's just go."

Marty was like, "We could malfunction."

"Oh, god," said Loga and Quendy, rolling their eyes.

Violet looked real uncomfortable now. It was pretty obvious she really didn't want to be with us.

Link looked around at the girls' faces. "What's the problem?" he said.

"Drop it, Link," I said. "We're not going in mal."

"I heard about this great site called Lobe-reamer. Eighty-five bucks, one click, and we'll be completely raked for an hour and a half. We won't know which way's up. That's big, big scrambled, for cheap."

"Unit!" said Marty. "We're fuckin' there!"

Link said, "Okay. Let's . . ."

"Drop it, units," I said. "No one wants to be fuguing."

"Am I no one?" said Link.

Calista was like, "Are you asking in terms of sex appeal?"

"Ow!" Marty said.

Link said, "Shut up, Marty."

Calista chatted all of us guys, *Don't like push this. Especially because the girl is meg un-into it.*

Link was like, *Lobe-reamer. Lobe-reamer! Do those words mean nothing to you?*

*Brake, Link. Brake and upgrade.*

There was no way he was getting lobotomized or weasel-faced, so we just went over to the Rumble Spot unslammed. It was their Youth in Action night, so we could get in.

It was meg big big loud. There was everything there. There was about a million people it seemed, and lights, and the beat was rocking the moon. There was a band hung by their arms and their legs from the ceiling, and there was girders and floating units going up and down, and these meg youch latex ripplechicks dancing on the bar, and there were all these frat guys that were wearing these, unit, they were fuckin' brag, they were wearing these tachyon shorts so you couldn't barely look at them, which were \$789.99 according to the feed, and they were on sale for like \$699 at the Zone, and could be shipped to the hotel for an additional \$78.95, and that was just one great thing that people were wearing. When I looked around, I wanted so much, that all of the prices were coming into my brain, and it was *bam bam bam*, like fugue-joy, and Loga and Quendy and Calista were already out on the dance floor, and my feed was like going fried, going things about the dance and pictures they were feedflinging across the dance floor of people on fire doing the moves.

Violet was screaming to me. I couldn't hear a thing. She was like, "*Da da da? Da da!*"

I was like, "What?"

She chatted me, *This is a scene.*

I was like, *Don't you dance?*

*Not really. Are these all college kids?*

*I bet most of them. Look at the guy in the, you know, that thing? The neck bat?*

*Bow tie.*



*Bow tie.*

He was maybe a hundred or so, dancing with the ripplechicks, a man in a dirty old tweed jacket, and he had this long white hair that looked kind of yellow, and his eyes were wide, like he was in mal, but I'm not sure he was in mal. He kept on sticking his thumbs up in the air.

And then they turned off the artificial gravity and we all went bounding accidentally, and it was like people cruising past each other with their necks kinked, and Violet grabbed on to my arm, and now I was thinking that even though she looked really uncomfortable, and like she was watching some kind of bugs in an experiment, it wasn't so bad being a bug as long as she grabbed on to my arm, so I said, *Don't worry. We'll drift down.*

*Sorry, she chatted.*

*No wrong, I said.*

*Really. I didn't mean to grab you.*

*No wrong.*

I put my hand over her hand on my arm, and then she smiled and took her hand out from under my hand, and by that time we'd come down again, and were bending our knees.

The guy with the tweed jacket had on a jetbelt, and he was flying around near the ceiling.

*You don't look like you're having fun, I chatted to her.*

*I will.*

*When?*

*I'm not used to this.*

*What do you do for fun?*

*When?*

*Normally.*

*I haven't been on the moon before.*

*I mean, anywhere. What do you do?*



The man with the bow tie was standing near us. He was trying to talk to Link by cranking Link's head around and shouting into his ear. Link was backing away.

*Are you having a good time?* she asked.

*The moon really isn't working out,* I said.

*Next time, maybe you should try Mars.*

*Yeah, I've been to Mars,* I said. *It was dumb.*

Suddenly, she laughed. *Are you serious?*

*Yeah, I'm serious.*

*Omigod,* she said. *Mars is a whole planet.*

*And it's dumb!*

She was like, *Dumb?*

She was starting to piss me off.

I said, *Yes, dumb.*

*The whole world?*

*Dumb.*

*The whole world.*

*Dumb.*

*Oh, this is golden.*

*The Red Planet was a piece of shit.*

I don't believe you could—but I couldn't receive any more of her chat because our feeds were spiking, and the music was getting louder, with the band singing "I'll Sex You In," and I saw her folding her arms like she didn't like me, and I didn't like her, and everyone was pulsing, even the old guy, and everyone was hopping, and they were scatterfeeding pictures across the floor: tribal dances, stuff with gourds, salsa, houses under breaking dams, women grinning, women oiling men with their fingertips, women taking out their teeth, girls' stomachs, boys' calves, rockets from old "movies" flaring, bikini tops, fingers creeping into nostrils, silos, suns—and the old man was standing by our side, and trying to yell, but we couldn't hear him, so he leaned closer, and said to us, to Marty and Violet and

now Link and me, he said, yelled, more like, he yelled:  
"We enter a time of calamity!"

We stared.

"We enter a time of calamity!"

We tried to back up, all of us except Violet, who was confused, and Link was saying, "This unit, he's like completely fuguing. He has this—"

"We enter a time of calamity! We enter a time of calamity!"

The old man reached out and, with a metal handle, touched me on the neck.

Suddenly, I could feel myself broadcasting. I was broadcasting across the scatterfeed, going, helplessly, *We enter a time of calamity! We enter a time of calamity!* I couldn't stop.

And he had touched Violet now, and Link, and Marty, and from all of them, it was coming, *We enter a time of calamity! We enter a time of calamity!*

And now I could feel that it was coming from other places, too, other people he had touched, and Marty was trying to say that he'd never had this before, it was kind of cool, but he couldn't because his signal was jammed just with that, over and over again, all of us in a chorus, going, *We enter a time of calamity! We enter a time of calamity!* and people were turning toward us. People were looking. We were standing in a line and the old guy was standing in front of us. People were moving away. The police were coming. I could see them. I couldn't really move much.

I felt a kind of kicking in my face and I discovered it was my mouth, which was saying the time of calamity thing, but at the top of my lungs. We were shouting, we were broadcasting, and then over us all, as the cops came through the crowd, the guy started this crazy calling,

both out loud and on the feed, this crazy calling over it all, over our chorus, and it went:

*"We enter a time of calamity. Blood on the tarmac. Fingers in the juicer. Towers of air frozen in the lunar wastes. Models dead on the runways, with their legs facing backward. Children with smiles that can't be undone. Chicken shall rot in the aisles. See the pillars fall."*

While we said, again and again, *"We enter a time of calamity. We enter a time of calamity,"* and others in the room said it, too, and Violet looked as scared as me, and I tried to take her hand, and she tried to take mine, and the police were by our side, hitting the man over the head again and again with stunners and sticks, and he fell on one knee, and finally my fingers found her wrist, Violet's. It felt so soft, like something I had never felt before. It felt like the neck of a swan in the wind.

And then the police were at our sides, whispering to us, "We're going to have to shut you off now. We're going to have to shut you off."

And then they touched us, and bodies fell, and there was nothing else.