

Part 2

eden

awake

The first thing I felt was no credit.

I tried to touch my credit, but there was nothing there.

It felt like I was in a little room.

My body—I was in a bed, on top of my arm, which was asleep, but I didn't know where. I couldn't find the Lunar GPS to tell me.

Someone had left a message in my head, which I found, and then kept finding everywhere I went, which said that there was no transmission signal, that I was currently disconnected from feednet. I tried to chat Link and then Marty, but nothing, there was no transmission signal, I was currently disconnected from feednet, of course, and I was starting to get scared, so I tried to chat my parents, I tried to chat them on Earth, but there was no transmission etc., I was currently etc.

So I opened my eyes.

college try

"Nothing," she said.

I had gotten up and was sitting on a chair beside her. We were in a hospital. We took up a ward.

Link was still asleep. Nurses went by.

I said, "I can't see anything. Through the feed."

"No," she said. "Or through my hospital gown. So stop trying."

I smiled. "You know, I thought maybe . . ."

"Sure you did. Want some apple juice?"

We'd been up for fifteen or twenty minutes. Everything in my head was quiet. It was fucked.

"What do we do?" she asked.

I didn't know.

boring

r. There was nothing there but the walls. We looked at them, and at each other. We looked really squelch. Our hair and stuff. We had remote relays attached to us to watch our blood and our brains.

o There were five walls, because the room was irregular. One of them had a picture of a boat on it. The boat was on a pond or maybe lake. I couldn't find anything interesting about that picture at all. There was nothing that was about to happen or had just happened.

z- I couldn't figure out even the littlest reason to paint a picture like that.

still boring

Our parents had been notified while we were asleep. Only Loga hadn't been touched by the hacker. She hadn't let him touch her, because he looked really creepy to her, so she stood way far away. There were also others, people we'd never met, who had been touched, and they were in the wards, too. He had touched thirteen people in all.

There was a police officer there, waiting in a chair. He told us that we would be off-line for a while, until they could see what had been done, and check for viruses, and decrypt the feed history to get information to use against the guy in court. They said that they had identified him, and that he was a hacker and a naysayer of the worst kind.

We were frightened, and kept touching our heads. Suddenly, our heads felt real empty.

At least in the hospital they had better gravity than the hotel.

missing the feed

I missed the feed.

I don't know when they first had feeds. Like maybe, fifty or a hundred years ago. Before that, they had to use their hands and their eyes. Computers were all outside the body. They carried them around outside of them, in their hands, like if you carried your lungs in a briefcase and opened it to breathe.

People were really excited when they first came out with feeds. It was all *da da da, this big educational thing, da da da, your child will have the advantage, encyclopedias at their fingertips, closer than their fingertips, etc.* That's one of the great things about the feed—that you can be supersmart without ever working. Everyone is supersmart now. You can look things up automatic, like science and history, like if you want to know which battles of the Civil War George Washington fought in and shit.

It's more now, it's not so much about the educational stuff but more regarding the fact that everything that goes on, goes on on the feed. All of the feedcasts and the

instant news, that's on there, so there's all the entertainment I was missing without a feed, like the girls were all missing their favorite feedcast, this show called *Oh? Wow! Thing!* which has all these kids like us who do stuff but get all pouty, which is what the girls go crazy for, the poutiness.

But the braggest thing about the feed, the thing that made it really big, is that it knows everything you want and hope for, sometimes before you even know what those things are. It can tell you how to get them, and help you make buying decisions that are hard. Everything we think and feel is taken in by the corporations, mainly by data ones like Feedlink and OnFeed and American Feedware, and they make a special profile, one that's keyed just to you, and then they give it to their branch companies, or other companies buy them, and they can get to know what it is we need, so all you have to do is want something and there's a chance it will be yours.

Of course, everyone is like, *da da da, evil corporations, oh they're so bad*, we all say that, and we all know they control everything. I mean, it's not great, because who knows what evil shit they're up to. Everyone feels bad about that. But they're the only way to get all this stuff, and it's no good getting pissy about it, because they're still going to control everything whether you like it or not. Plus, they keep like everyone in the world employed, so it's not like we could do without them. And it's really great to know everything about everything whenever we want, to have it just like, in our brain, just sitting there.

In fact, the thing that made me pissy was when they couldn't help me at all, so I was just lying there, and couldn't play any of the games on the feed, and couldn't chat anyone, and I couldn't do a fuckin' thing except look at that stupid boat painting, which was even worse,

because now I saw that there was no one on the boat, which was even more stupid, and was kind of how I felt, that the sails were up, and the rudder was, well, whatever rudders are, but there was no one on board to look at the horizon.

cache & carry

I had a few pages cached, from right before the feed stopped. I flipped through them sadly. I went back and forth between them. One was a message from the crazy asshole, which said, *You have been hacked by the Coalition of Pity*. The other was a good sale at Weatherbee & Crotch, which, by this time, I had probably missed. It was too bad, because I would have liked to have been able to take the opportunity to check out these great bargains, for example they had a trim-shirt with side pockets that I thought I probably would have bought, except it only came in sand, persimmon, and vetch.

night, and boring

It was Saturday night. The main lights were out. It had been a day since any of us had heard from the feed. Our parents were probably already on the moon, and were coming to the hospital the next morning.

For most of the day since we woke up after the attack, we had stared at the walls. We'd been sitting in our beds, and we tapped our feet on the rails. None of us could get the tune of "I'll Sex You In" out of our heads. Someone kept starting it up, and then the others would swear and tell them to shut up. Then we couldn't help ourselves, and we'd start to tap it out on our trays with a spork.

Link had finally woken up, and he paced up and down the floor. Loga came by during the afternoon and she talked to all of us, and she kept saying, "Ohhhhh! Ohhhhh!" in this sorry tone of voice, which was nice, except that then she would pause and we could tell she was m-chatting all the news back to our friends on Earth. Occasionally, she'd forget and she'd say out loud to no one, "Omigod! Yes! Right here!" or "Hello . . . ?" or whatever it was she was saying in her head. She would laugh at jokes we couldn't hear.

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Once, she went to the bathroom, casual-like, and came back with her hair parted a different place. Calista and Quendy watched her.

Later, without saying anything, they went and did theirs different like that, too.

Marty was sometimes saying his usual kind of thing, which was like, "Fuck this shit. Fuck this." He wanted to be out playing basketball or something.

There was nothing to do. Violet stared at her hands in her lap. I looked over at her. I smiled, you know, supportive. She looked at me and then went back to staring at her hands.

Now it was night, and all the big lights were out. We were lying there. There were machines that were taking our pulse and shit. We were all supposed to be sleeping.

I heard Violet walk across the floor and head for the bathroom. A few minutes later, I heard her walking back.

"Hey," I said.

"Yeah. Hey," she said. She stopped.

"You can . . . ," I said. I pulled myself up against the pillows. "Why don't you sit down for a sec?"

She sat down in the chair by my bed. I could see the curve of her nose against my pulse, which was green and bumpy.

We sat there for a little while. I was thinking, *This is nice. We're just sitting here. We don't have to say anything.*

I felt real contented. I lay my head back on my pillow.

I looked over at her face. I could see the light from my heartbeat on her tears.

I said, "You're . . . hey. You're crying."

"Yes," she said.

"You don't . . ." I didn't know how to say what I wanted. I tried, "You don't seem like a crier."

"No," she said.

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We sat. Now the silence wasn't very good. Her head was low. I could see the curve of her cheek against my brain waves, which were red and loopy.

She said, "You go try to have fun like a normal person, a normal person with a real life—just for one night you want to live, and suddenly you're screwed."

"You're not screwed."

"I'm screwed."

We sat there. I wanted to say something to cheer her up. I had a feeling that cheering her up might be a lot of work. I was thinking of how sometimes, trying to say the right thing to people, it's like some kind of brain surgery, and you have to tweak exactly the right part of the lobe. Except with talking, it's more like brain surgery with old, rusted skewers and things, maybe like those things you use to eat lobster, but brown. And you have to get exactly the right place, and you're touching around in the brain, but the patient, she keeps jumping and saying, "Ow." Thinking of it like this, I started to not want to say anything. I kept thinking of nice things I could say, like, "I'm glad you went out last night, because that's how I met you," or, "And I think you *are* a normal person," but they all seemed just smarm.

So we just sat there, together, and we didn't say anything. And it wasn't bad.

I hoped she could see my smile in the light of my brain.