Now Yao peeks at his clipboard and shouts another name into the waiting room, but the head that pokes through the beaded curtain is just older than middle-aged, with faint waves of permanent worry cresting on its brow. Dr. Rui Zhang stoops into the room, looking a little too tall for the clinic’s doors, and also for the midnight-purple YINS tracksuit pulled taut to his wrists. He looks, as he always does, surprised by something in the middle distance that no one else can quite make out.

“Oh! Dr. Rui!”

“Yao *tongxue*,” he regards our young Yao somewhat airily, fishing for a pen in his waist pack. “And Xu as well. You know there’s no overtime pay, right?” He chuckles to himself. “Sometimes I wonder.”

“She came down to help with a new inversion,” Yao explains, and I do rather think he’s beaming at me, his senior classmate.

“Is that so?” Rui looks up from the logbook, glances at the closet where the Deng Bridge is stowed, and then back to me. I give him a smile like a shrug. “Mind if I take a peek?”

The next Suowei employee finds her way in, bumping into walls. She arrived complaining of *intensely painful golden light at center of being* due to *don’t know/decline to say.* We cluster into the control bank, wondering if what just happened was a fluke or something more. It takes longer this time, almost thirty seconds, but my new inversion binds flawlessly. Rui peers at its spectrum, making little *hrmm* noises, oblivious to the patient we help out of the chair. “So is this some clever trick with Lam fibration?” He clicks his pen in my direction, and, caught in his headlights, I can only stare. “Ah, quite right, that wouldn’t....” He mumbles. “Temporal smearing in the binding graph preimage, perhaps?”

Using none of those words, I recount the story of where the inversion came from. Rui’s eyebrows flee, caterpillar-like, up his forehead in surprise. Here I grasp for details of what I actually did in loop-lock, which only serves to stir them further in my memory.

“But that’s never worked before,” he insists quietly. Then, as though rearranging the sentence might dispel the mystery, he declares, “Never before has that worked. Deng won’t be happy to hear that old box has a new lease on life, I can say that much. So it *was* the temporal smearing, then?”

“I...well, no!” The idea of Dr. Rui Zhang, the world’s foremost authority on soberware, eyeing me as a mathematical prodigy is both deeply amusing and not a ruse I can keep up for long. “It’s just something I did. I don’t really know how.”

But he smiles wryly. “You know, Lam herself used to say something similar. *Math is what happens in the moment*. Don’t sell yourself quite as short as that.” It looks like he wants to say something else here — the worst part of me is hoping for a dig at Dr. Deng — but then he thinks better of it. “I think that between you and Mr. Yao, the situation here is under control. But, interesting...interesting...”

As Rui hastens off in a kind of speed-walk, Yao turns to me and mutters: “could have applications to soberware.”

It’s not Dr. Rui’s fault that his whole subfield is the butt of one of YINS’ favorite jokes. I mean, okay, it kind of is. Maybe he shouldn’t have stood up and asked about *applications to soberware* at so many guest lectures and thesis defenses. Yet I have a vague sense that the undergrads aren’t allowed to find it funny. I’m about to insist to Yao with a half-straight face: *That man is a luminary!* But then our next patient loses his balance, grabs for one of the curtains, and sends a hailstorm of rainbow-colored voxelite beads clattering to the floor.