And that’s what I wake from at half past midnight this third night, sheets wrapped around me, channels buzzing deliciously. My boots are still damp, still squeaking, on my way down the stairs. This time I’m not so coy with myself about why I’ve ventured outside. I toe the western boundary of another ward, preparing to tap my card. *What you’re looking for isn’t in Xietu South,* I admit to myself. *That’s why you moved here, remember?*

And this is how I find myself in the private gardens of an apartment complex two wards over, crouched in the shrubbery, staring into their fishbowl. *It’s hurting you to avoid it,* which is the rationale of the insane and the addicted. *You just need a little peek.* The fishbowl is mostly dormant, but narrow strands of a Ripple flick in unmistakable standing waves along its edges. I lean forward, keeping to the shadows, for a slightly better look. *Get in closer. It’s on a delay, anyhow.* But I know that plenty of “delayed” Mirror Sea feeds run realtime, because the entire carnival of commerce surrounding Ripplechasing depends on it. I remember Cai telling me that —

“You there! Freeze!”

And my body gives me no other choice. My knees are locked like this, my hands in the air. A redlight enters the courtyard, wearing a rose-quartz badge and bulletproof silk, lofting a Maglite. But his beam catches a man way to my left, scrawling deftly on the compound wall. His lines flow like topography, like a heatmap, bulging and wiggling but never intersecting. He draws counterclockwise from the center out, and his little jerky pauses tell me the pattern is not random, not memorized, but somehow...transcribed. He keeps going, red-handed, flicking glances towards the fishbowl, and the lampposts, and the LEDs blinking in high shadows. Getting a few more strokes in...

“Come with your hands up! I’ll shoot!”

The redlight twists open his vialgun. But it’s an empty threat, and I see what he doesn’t. Another black-clad figure is crouched on a high ledge, adjusting a camera. The first Chalker looks left and ducks right. He gains altitude off a bench and, clutching the arms of his companion, is carried to safety over the compound wall. The redlight swings his flashlight around halfheartedly; I hold very, very still. Then he grumbles away. And moments later, by pure coincidence, the last tendrils of the Ripple in the spherical quasigraphic display flick out of sight.

I crouch, shivering, for five minutes before I dare to move. I try all the old tricks for *getting into it:* I stare blankly into the fishbowl and its lazy hints of Ripples, focusing just past it. I loosen the boundaries of self, trying to make my vision go wide. I look for my head, hoping not to find it. Finally I admit that it might be a lost cause. Ripplechasing is just no fun when you’re alone.

I emerge from the bushes to inspect the sigil, wondering what I can glean from it, if it could lead me where I want to go. But the chalk has already melted in the downpour.