Hours later, when it’s finally plain old me, my big question is how I got across the river. I started in Pudong and now, with the sun rising across my back, I am walking through deep Puxi, just one ward from home. I suffer not a dearth of memory, but an excess, a hypermemory. In its facets I take the Metro and walk a footbridge and even hang hooting and hollering from the side of a veetle. Are any of these mine? Are they even real? The comedown felt like a pleasant, lazy slide that narrowed, and narrowed me, until I *plunked* irreversibly back into my own subjectivity. Trying to peer back up it now, it seems impossibly steep. Part of it is pride, too. If we had managed to move a Ripple across the Huangpu, I can’t help but think, that was damn fine work.

My last Ripplechasing stint ended in disaster, in a graduate dormitory suite waist deep with water from every tap I could open. I also had to take a class. *Remedial belief modulation*, in a building across town; its drabness only fed my suspicion that it was Weather Bureau headquarters. The instructor drew a squeaky parabola on the board and wrote the words: QUADRATIC BELIEF. You give it *this* much, he explained, and it gives you *that* back squared, and so you feed it and feed it. Yes, *you* in the back, you personally. We had all shown ourselves susceptible to quadratic belief, and we were all to avoid so much as thinking about the Mirror Sea — nevermind that we could see it through the window blinds — as it was a canvas on which we might paint any delusion, any fantasy, any distortion of consensus reality.

But once in a while, maybe that’s what I need.

After days of rain the sweetness of the sun tinges our world, drying the damp from my YINS hoodie, calming the shiver in my bones. It touches their world, too. Projected stories high on the wall of a parking ramp, the Sea erupts with fragmentary, concentric bursts of orange in all the places you don’t expect. You could intuit a lot about the operation of the Lam-Waldmann Hash by watching these blooms. Or at least someone could. *I’m* freezing and hungry and focused on remembering how to use my feet. The Ripples are properly out now, in ordinary textures of traffic and street cleaning and middle managers on morning jogs. Against my better judgement I stop and stare, one more time, grasping for that slippery impression of how it felt to see one through fifty pairs of eyes at once. Of how they’re *really* shaped.

A tiny pipsqueak of a thing nips at the edge of a much larger Ripple. This is to be expected. When two Ripples collide, sloshed or jostled or maybe egged on, they interfere, flaying each others’ outer layers into decoherence. Whether this is fucking or fighting or finnicking, that’s above my pay grade. But we can all at least agree that it obeys the principles of wave mechanics, and that it makes for a hell of a show. The little one might be a wake-parasite, hitching a ride on the big one’s motile force. It might be a small part of a larger self, trying desperately to recohere before being forgotten in the churn. It might —

I stop dead in my tracks, look and look again. There’s no way.

“*Crazies*!” A delivery driver squeals to a stop in front of me, hollering out the window. “Lowlife nutcases!”

I’m across two lanes of traffic, four, dashing across the street to get a better look at that tiny blob before it flits away. Now I’m right up against the screen, the heat of individual pixels, craning my neck. The way the blob undulates, the zebra-stripe patterns that thrum concentrically along it, are more than familiar — much more than familiar. *This* is quadratic belief, this is the shallow of the parabola and *you need to look away right now* because it’s only gonna get deeper. But I barely even blink. I drink in the sight until I’m either absolutely sure, or sure I’ve lost it.

Lens blur, undertow, vertigo: something pulls on my attention, and I realize the blob isn’t chasing the larger Ripple at all. It refocuses on something else, its movement tracking my attention all too precisely.

Waterfall-curtains of it, the gentle-twinkling golden of it, the clawing, spiraling, murmuring of it. *I know I’ve seen these shapes before*: the thought unfurls unbidden, prophecy into fact. I *have* seen it before, now, in Tethi’s tiles and the shards in my backpack and even now, half-submerged in my own depths. And now I see it in the Mirror Sea: kelplike strands of Material #110, sieve debris. And orbiting it, probing it, that flashing blob knows its only purpose, seeks an opening. *Am I really seeing this or is it just in my head but the difference is no difference the question is no longer fun it’s a pit it’s a parabola...*

There’s a flash: a loopback whisper — *holdingonletgo* — and the debris is gone. Gone from the screen, gone from my mind’s eye, gone from their brief and terrifying confluence. And from that paraeidolic maw, from that churn of everything and nothing, the diving-bell has disappeared as well.