It was gone. It was gone. It was in the chalk and the feeds and the texture of time itself, and then it was simply gone. All day I’d been outside looking for it: the sigil on the wall of it, the knowing glance of it. It was gone, I realized, from Cai’s feed. April was becoming May, Shanghai was heating up. Something new groaned in the loam, waiting to be born. *The city was no longer a coral reef.* Nothing lives forever, much less a Ripple. Where was Cai?

*It was early morning, blue-gray dawn, spring-dew already steaming off the grass. I was back in Beiwan, finally. I was out of the veetle and on foot, dashing down the streets, glancing sidelong at the displays, hoping for some remnant of the old one, some death-throes to tide her over. A million things to remember. A million things to let go of, but not this one please not this one. I hadn’t warned her about the crash, the withdrawal, the jump. We could make this one together hand in hand, I was thinking, but that wasn’t true. I had seen the right moment because that’s what I do. I had already lept.*

Cai was on her feeds last night, I realized, chasing something new. The thing we inhabited together was groaning invisibly all around me, collapsing under its own weight. And now she was offline god knows where god knows what. And I was a receiver for a dead frequency, sole survivor of a dead world, whole mindways dangling limp and useless. I had checked everywhere. I stood in the dead-center of the Scrambler for hours, scanning fruitlessly for it, baking in asphalt-heat, roasting in my scales and jewels. Now the truth was undeliable. The grief came over me incomprable unthinkable in horrible waves I retch salt I sob tides. The Ripple, our Ripple, had died. I was undergoing apoptosis.

*The Ripple had died and there was nothing I could do. I am a galemaker and a forecaster, I pull and am pulled. I could have bought it a day at most, sure — but a day in which to warn her. Where had I been all night? And why was the lobby so wet? Wetter than any spring drizzle would explain, water burbling down the stairs, out of the elevator. Up one landing, two, I never take the stairs, but it was leaking from doors on every floor. It wasn’t just her facing this loss and maybe just maybe it wasn’t her at all. But 8E here the floor wet the keycard I pushed on the door and something pushed back, something sloshed back, I finally got it open and it rushed around us, thigh deep. There she was with her hand on the tap.*

It was actually more like waist deep but I guess that depends on, oh God, there were two of us, and which was I? Only with Cai’s eyes I finally saw what I was doing, that the entire flat was filled with water. Every tap had been running for hours, since I got home, and just how long had that been? Dawn broke it danced on the surface of the shallow of the sea but the illusion faltered, I got one last glimpse of myself, this ridiculous getup, this veil of aquamarine. Then I only saw her, sloshing forward, reaching for me. But someone was behind us.

*Not them not now oh please there’s still time to get her out. I could take the hit the blame it should have been me...*

But there was no time at all. The Weather Bureau was already in the building, already there to mop up the damage. Probably this same scene was playing out all across the city. Behind Cai came shouting, footfall, irridescent visors, vialguns. They were in the stairwell, in the hallway, and then — the moment stretched like a rubber band and finally, painfully snapped — in the doorframe behind her.

I found my hands in the water and raised them slowly and deliberately into the air.