The door chimes Infrasong as I step inside, sending my spine tingling. It’s dim halogen, floor to ceiling pegboard shelving, and maybe *miscellaneous* is an understatement. Blenders and water heaters are stocked between factory-reject TPU arrays and stadium-grade quasigram projectors. A row of plastic tubs brims with voxelite pilfered from the city’s trading floors, three eggs for twenty ping. But a familiar iridescence draws my eye, and then my feet, to the glass display case in the back.

The shopkeeper reserved all their care for these smoothly metallic teardrops, two dozen total, each in its own foam-lined case. I never noticed from ground level how much they vary in shape. But they’re all the size of a hand fruit, with the same basic structure. The tapered side has an inlet for CAT-5. The bulbous end hides the lens behind mirrored coating. It’s stamped with the blind-eye that has become synonymous with Shanghai.

“Get a load of the serial numbers.” A quiet voice startles me, emerging from the back through thick plastic drapes. The laoban is a woman just past the crest of middle age, with a sharp chin, weathered features, a pleasant crinkle around the eye. Her hair is buzzed perfunctorily short. “Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh-five-seven-nine,” she reads fondly off the leftmost Mirror Sea camera. She speaks so softly that I have to lean in to make this out. “This is a prototype from the the Century Park pilot. But, count the digits — they had ambitions.”

This woman is Zhang Peifeng, I realize. Or rather she has his N-1 license, and used it to log into the Soup and contact Deng. The cameras, the weird and stilted messages to an old colleague, it all adds up to something like this. I consider how to come clean. And then — despite my purpose here, despite everything, I ask: “Can I hold it?”

I expect her to laugh me off, but she nods solemnly and fetches a pair of microfiber gloves for each of us. “They had a real problem with fingerprints at first. The hash is sensitive to patterns like that — careful, *careful*,” she mutters, placing it into my hands. It has real heft, maybe double what I expected. “Here, take the front and give it a twist.”

I do, gingerly, feeling three tiny clicks and a satisfying counterclockwise whir. Then, from a seam unseen, the hemispherical cap falls into my hand. There’s a milky-quartz dragonfly eye behind it, or that’s how it looks, hundreds of nearly opaque facets that let light play through them only along intricate, rainbow-flecked micrometer grooves. An optical implementation of the Lam-Waldmann hash, carved by laser into real quartz. For the architects of the Mirror Sea, there could be no second-guessing the anonymizing properties of their surveillance system. A conventional lens, with the hash running in software behind it, would never win the public’s trust.

She hesitates now, leaning around me to peer out at the deserted, unlit courtyard. From a locked box beneath the cabinet, she produces a truly ancient CRT monitor no wider than my hand. She looks me over, once, twice, and then asks, “would you like to see?”

What the Weather Bureau did left me with a reflexive *no* to this question. But I didn’t come here to look away. I nod, and she peeks up, out the window, back at me. Satisfied, she digs for a power cable. It occurs to me that since entering Fengzhen Ward I haven’t seen a single Mirror Sea display. Not on the walls, not embedded in the sidewalks, not even on a cheap TV by a sushi-counter fish tank. Something half-dawns on me. *But if she thinks it’*s *safe*...

She clips a CAT-5 cable into the camera and it beeps once. “Now look.”

I gasp softly when I see what appears onscreen. It has depth, this jagged and concentric formation. It reflects faint hints of Min’s Miscellaneous in the color, texture, and geometry of its facets. I would say it’s kaleidoscopic, but there’s a way in which it’s precisely not: while a kaleidoscope is sensitive to tiny movements, the Lam-Waldmann Hash of the store’s interior barely changes as I swing the camera around. I point the lens at the shopkeeper; she raises an eyebrow, but appears only as a dark bloom on the peaks of larger waves. After a while she gestures for the camera back.

“I’ll part with it for forty thousand ping.” She smiles at my nervous laughter. “But not lightly, and not for a stranger. It serves me better as a conversation piece, anyway. So what can I really do for you?”

“I’m looking for Dr. Zhang Peifeng.” I steady myself. I make it a statement and not a question, and scan her politely bemused eyes for recognition. “I — he — we talked on the —”

The door crashes open. She saw it happening, but too late, one hand stowing the monitor and the other reaching fruitlessly for a remote to lock the door. Two tall, black-clad figures stride down the center aisle in perfect unison, and I have the horrible sense that something alien watches us through the fixed parallax of their four beady eyes. *But that’s the wrong number of eyes.* A three-by-three diamond formation of stylized eyes is painted — no, tattooed — onto their chalk-white foreheads. They blink in the strangest sort of way: I can pry them open one by one with my attention, but they snap closed the moment I look away. I know who these people are; I just never believed they existed.

The Chalkers aren’t a monolith. Their disagreements play out on the walls, just under our noses. Their affiliations are — not to put too fine a point on it — as ephemeral and illegible as anything you’d find in the Mirror Sea. But there are old ways to be remembered. Beliefs, root-level and bone-dry, to be held in a deeply parabolic stillness and silence. And the Nine-Eyes keep them, in their triple-point redoubts, studded with Mirror Sea cameras but utterly devoid of Mirror Sea displays. *Because —* the thought prickles my from neck into my shoulders — *because they don’t need them, any more than a fish needs a snorkel.* No, that’s not quite right. *Any more than the ocean needs a snorkel.*

“You looked,” one of them intones. The way his voice cracks, almost squeaks, from extended disuse: it would be funny, but it isn’t. They both speak at the same time. *“We just saw you looking.”* The words come with — no, the words *are* a tightening grasp, choking me into a tight loop of only-just-memory, of gazing into the output of that single camera. I grip the glass countertop, ripping my gaze back towards the woman, who I’ve decided must be Min. There’s fear on her face, but mixed with a gradation of annoyance and a glimmer of thrilled amusement. Most likely this has happened before.

“Our arrangement has been in place for a long time.” She emphasizes those last two words, as though speaking for the record, for an unseen observer. “I can’t sell just to you. The shop won’t survive. It was *one* camera —”

*“Too close. Too often.”* They redouble their insistence, the words growing convex. *“Not careful. And at night.”*

With a telescoping baton, with metronomic four-four precision, one of them begins to break things. The other leans down towards Min, his forehead in her face, her eyes locked into something I can’t see. Whatever fury irradiates her, it exists at such a scale that these men amount to mere pinholes. Maybe that’s what she finds amusing. But she sighs, infuriated, as the Nine-Eye palms her antique camera. “We’re taking this. No sale.”

“The fuck you are,” comes a voice from the back. A voice — my head spins, drowning in the perfectly periodic crashing sounds coming from the aisles — a voice that I *recognize*. The plastic curtain parts again, and there stands Mbetethi Okeme. Tethi. Whatever. “Put it down and go.”

Two things: Tethi is taller than this Chalker, which counts for something, and his gaze is positively blazing with Sunflower Sieve debris. I wouldn’t call it a controlled burn, but he’s got a mental harness or two around it — I see him smile when it whips in a direction I can only describe as outwards. He clears the counter fluidly and stings the closer Nine-Eyes with a small and possibly homemade taser. The sound it makes, the *smell* it makes: it should have sent the man writhing to the floor. But he only peers back at Tethi with timid, almost pathetic surprise.

*“Go,”* Tethi shouts again. “You need us here. This the arrangement.” To my astonishment, they do. The stung Chalker stumbles back towards the door and his partner follows as though bungee-corded along, running his baton percussively along a shelf of rice cookers. “Expect a bill,” Tethi snarls, as the door closes — and locks — behind them. For a minute I’m not even there. He holds her defensively, panting, expelling adrenaline. In truth, he looks more shaken than Min, who is merely surveying the damage with double-precision dismay.

“What are you doing, pretending to be a professor?” She ducks out of his embrace, smacks the back of his head with her still-gloved hand, and scans the back for a dustpan. “You’re bringing trouble to the shop, Teth.”

“Auntie Min.” He addresses her as *Min ayi*, with considerable disbelief but not an ounce of disrespect. “*I’m* bringing trouble to the shop?”

“I watched this sweet young woman sit outside in the rain waiting for, ahem, Dr. Zhang Peifeng.” She pronounces the name musically. “I *saw* that name on one of those N-1 licenses. Why do you do this? *They* are one thing, *them* I can deal with” — she points out the door — “but it is the *height* of *foolishness* to drag a Fudan professor into your *schemes!*” She turns to me, the fury draining so quickly from her face that I have to laugh. “Are you all right, dear?”

Tethi finally turns his eyes to me. I see that a lot has accumulated there since we last met: a surplus of neikotic debris, for one, and a deficit of sleep. But a small, weary smile appears symmetrically on our faces. Because, surely, each of us are dead certain the other is thinking the same thing: *Son of a bitch, I should have known!*