*I just need to lie down for a while.* My body is taking this like an infection, fighting it with a fever. Tethi takes me to the roof of Old New Prosperity. It’s the first truly cool night of autumn. He sets me up with musty microfiber blankets, plus a chipped mug of chamomile, his idea of a joke. I don’t speak for a long time.

I have waterlogged, chewed-through foundations that must finally come down, and nothing to replace them. Everything I ever heard about the Ripples comes back as a needling, random-access prickle, and I recast it through this image of them *operating machinery* in their own world. Their agency is supposed to be faint and illusory. Their motion is supposed to be borrowed from ours. If they can be said to be doing anything at all, they are ultimately and inevitably doing it *here.*

Something is hiding in the texture of time. And if that weren’t enough, something else is making a periodic *ker-thoink* sound that’s driving me absolutely crazy*.* Through stray, fever-slick strands of hair, I see Tethi bouncing a rubber ball against a concrete backstop. *Ker-thoink.* It ricochets off the ground, against the wall, and back into his hand. But I have become deeply unmoored, so that the cause-and-effect of ball, wall, gravity, and hand is…doing a thing. A *stare into the dot* *and the lines will wiggle* thing. A *how do these lights get so tangled just sitting in the box* thing.

“Could you please stop that…” I groan, just now sitting up.

“Watch it move,” Tethi tells me. Three short English words. He looks relieved to hear me up and speaking. *Ker-thoink.* And something about watching the ball does it. It all reels up rather imperfectly, but Tethi and Mona snap back into focus.

“Should have warned you before I put you in. Don’t take it right to the head,” he says, gluing English to Mandarin by way of French. “In there you need to be perceiving things *obliquely,* yeah? Not looking directly at them.”

I have only an inkling of what he means, so I choose to keep focusing on the ball. “It bounces?” I ask. Because, thanks to a glint of moonlight, I’ve realized it’s actually one of his Sieve orbs. “The Sunflower Sieve bounces.”

“Nothing in the Soup about it yet.” *Ker-thoink.*

“No one’s tried dropping one, I guess.”

*Ker-thoink.* “Could be your next big paper.”

The orb hits his palm with a satisfying smack. For a minute of pleasant silence, through an unlikely gap in the skyline, we enjoy a clear view of distant and twinkling Pudong. Blurry Ripples crawl the twist of the Suowei Tower.

“Mona — I can call you that, yes?”

“Well, it’s sure as shit not Dr. Xu,” I lob back, but politely. I have the egg now and I’m very much enjoying its *ker-thoink.*

“Mona. I said earlier I was going to ask a favor of you. So I’m just going to come right out and say it. No preamble or anything. But I think it’s justified. I think I’d do well.” He rocks back and forth a little. He looks pretty nervous for a maybe-kinda Chalker, for a hardened refugee of the Gabonese Fork. “Take me to YINS.”

I give him a look. “What do you mean, take you?”

“I mean take me. Introduce me to people. Get me involved.” He falters, a rehearsed argument melting in his mouth. “Straight up, I want what you have. You’re working under Deng Jinghan, you know how many people would kill for that?”

I laugh bitterly, and he takes it the wrong way.

“No. Fuck that. I’ve been laughed out of too many rooms in this city. They laughed me out of the room at Suowei and Paracoin, and I learned to wipe the floor with their traders. They turned me down at Kanwei, and I built a scanner out of scraps. And now I’m sitting on a revelation. You and I are, now. *Think about what I just showed you.* The Ripples are building something —”

“It’s not possible!” I shout, still feverish, newly shaken. “Please stop saying that!”

“It is possible,” he insists flatly. “It wouldn’t be, if the Mirror Sea was only what’s on those screens. But I’ve seen too much to believe that.” He fixes his gaze on my forearm where the moonlight, the right light, reveals remnants of my sigil tattoo. “And I think you have too.”

A trillion once-unseen coincidences woven together by a billion eyes. The slow, impossible, inevitable accretion of stability, unfolding of patterns, dripping of glass. The curves tug and tighten, indistinguishable from need, from agency, from life. The Ripples aren’t what’s on those screens. They’re what *we* see there. So of coursethey want. Of course they create. We’ve watched them too closely, let them too deep into our minds. And now we’ve given them lightning from their crystalline sky, a stranger kind of fire.

We’ve given them neikotics. And they’ve built a city of what we took for debris.

“I think about what to do with this,” Tethi starts again, slowly, deliberately. “I think the Chalk knows, in its own way. I think the Weather Bureau knows *something*, because they’re looking for me now, and if they catch me they’ll never let me go. So where do I turn? Blue Delta? The Big Three? I’ve thought it over and over and over, and at the end of the day I trust YINS. I trust you. So let me help you handle it safely. Let me in.”

I whip the Sieve egg at the wall, relieved at the predictable way it moves under familiar forces. Resenting that: wishing for a wider mind, ample space to fit new ways of seeing as they come. The orb takes a weird hop. Flies past my face and into Tethi’s outstretched hand.

“And I’m a hell of an engineer,” he adds. “I belong at YINS. Tell me I don’t, or introduce me to Deng Jinghan.”

I scan his face for the usual twitch of smile, of self-deprecation, but why the fuck should I expect to find it? The man built a loop-lock rig from scavenged parts and wired it into the Mirror Sea. Of course he deserves to be at YINS. Probably more than I do.

“You know this is insane, right?”

“I know I need to leave this place before it kills me. I was only ever supposed to be here a week.” He gazes out towards Triple Point, down towards Min’s shop across the courtyard, lights blazing past midnight, and I know he’s thinking about what he’ll tell her. “I know I can’t waltz into a position at YINS. So tell me how to impress them. One shot.”

“Yeah. Yeah. Wait. Hold on.” For a second there I was getting choked up, a little, maybe. But something is coming together. “Hold the fuck on. You’re an electrical engineer. You can work with readonly nets, beamformers, all that good stuff?”

The way he nods, I might have asked whether he can tie his shoes.

“You wanna help me run an experiment?”