

INT. QUINTESSENCE LOBBY - AFTERNOON

Will escorts Zia across the airy lobby toward the front doors. A small cafe is set up against one wall. Employees sit at small tables drinking coffee and eating snacks. A team of receptionists sit at a central circular desk.

WILL  
...glad you're almost rid of me...

A young nervous-looking man, AID, in a business suit intercepts Will.

AID  
Mr. Wittenberg?

WILL  
Yes?

AID  
I, uh... can I speak with you, sir?

WILL  
Can it wait?

The Aid shakes his head and clutches a clipboard to his chest. Will sighs.

WILL (cont'd)  
Will you excuse me for a moment,  
Zia?

Will steers her gently towards the cafe.

WILL (cont'd)  
Try a latte.

Will goes out of earshot with the aid, who keeps glancing nervously at Zia. Zia does not get in line to order drinks.

A teenager, PHIE, appears next to Zia. Sixteen, long blond hair tied back in a stylishly messy ponytail. She might be slightly taller than Zia but she stands with a hip cocked. She wears a school uniform. Grey pleated skirt, white blouse, and a red and gray tie, slightly crooked. She wears an unzipped black hoodie over it. The girl looks from Will to Zia.

PHIE  
The lattes are horrible.

ZIA  
Excuse me?

PHIE  
The lattes. They're lousy. You're not missing much. When Tate's on they make a decent Chai, but he only works three days a week.

Zia looks at the girl, slightly unbalanced by this talkative stranger.

PHIE (cont'd)  
So, what do you think of him?

ZIA  
Who?

PHIE  
Will, of course.

ZIA  
He is... young.

Phie laughs.

PHIE  
Does that mean you're here for business or...  
(she glances at Will, rolls her eyes)  
pleasure?

ZIA  
Business, thankfully.

PHIE  
(smiling)  
Ah.

Zia looks at Will, who is for the moment preoccupied, speaking with the Aid.

ZIA  
Not that he hasn't been trying to turn business into pleasure.

PHIE  
That's funny. You don't seem like his type... you're too...

Phie takes a closer look at Zia, she seems puzzled.

PHIE  
Have we met before?

ZIA  
I do not believe so.

PHIE  
Well, in that case...

She shifts a shoulder bag and coat from her right to left hand and offers to shake.

PHIE (cont'd)  
It's a pleasure to meet you...?

ZIA  
Zia.

She takes the proffered hand. Something about Phie puts Zia at ease. She even smiles a little.

PHIE  
Zia. Nice to meet you. I'm--

WILL  
Phie? What are you doing here?

Will stands in front of the two women. The Aid disappears behind him, clipboard still clutched to his chest. Will looks concerned.

Phie looks at Will and sighs theatrically.

PHIE  
It's four thirty...

She waits for him to put it together. He doesn't.

PHIE (cont'd)  
School got out an hour ago.

WILL  
Oh, Phie, I'm sorry. I know I promised to pick you up-

PHIE  
Don't worry about it. I bummed a ride with Charlotte.

WILL  
I just forgot, I was-

PHIE

Really, don't worry about it.

Will stands uncomfortably, not sure whether to apologize again or not. Finally he jumps to make introductions.

WILL

Zia, this is my sister, Phie-

ZIA

Your sister?

Zia quickly looks at Phie, reevaluating her assessment of her. Phie doesn't notice but Will does.

PHIE

Yes, yes, we've met already.

(teasing)

You know, contrary to your belief that women are incapable of doing anything without you, we managed to introduce ourselves just fine.

I like her. Her opinion of you seems quite accurate as well.

Zia smiles to herself. Will completely outmaneuvered looks between them.

WILL

Her opinion of me? Which is...?

PHIE

For us to know.

Will puts his hands up in mock surrender.

WILL

All right, all right. Keep your secrets.

Will glances over his shoulder and loses his smile. He looks back at Zia and Phie.

WILL

Look, Phie, I need to talk to Zia for a couple of minutes. Then I'll take you to dinner or something.

PHIE

I was hoping you'd feel guilty enough to buy me McD's for dinner.

WILL  
Oh no, anything but that.

Phie gives him a look.

WILL (cont'd)  
Okay, okay, McD's it is.

Phie turns to Zia.

PHIE  
You should come to.

Zia and Will look awkwardly between one another. They both start speaking at the same time.

ZIA  
I really can't--

WILL  
Another time perhaps--

Phie raises an eyebrow.

WILL  
Look, just give me a couple  
minutes, kay?

He fishes in his pocket and comes up with his credit chip.

WILL (cont'd)  
Get a latte or something, okay?  
I'll be right back.

Will takes Zia's elbow and moves her away from Phie who just shakes her head.

ZIA  
She doesn't like them.

WILL  
What?

ZIA  
Nothing. What is it?

Will shifts uncomfortably. Not making eye contact.

WILL  
I'm afraid I've just been told...  
well, last night... well, what I'm  
trying to say is...

Zia reads the look on his face.

ZIA

Let me guess. What you're worried about comes in a little box about this big

(she holds up her hands)  
it's clear and shiny, it's unmarked, and I'm betting it's untraceable.

WILL

You sound like Phie.

ZIA

You were just informed about missing Dust chips.

WILL

Yes.

Zia uncrosses her arms.

ZIA

I'll let Pascal know. I'm sure he can get a team on it by tomorrow.

WILL

No, you don't understand. If someone gets their hands on these... tries to use them... It could be bad. Really bad.

Zia nods, studying Will.

ZIA

How many are missing?

WILL

Twenty.

Zia nods.

ZIA

Then I guess I'm not rid of you quite yet, am I Will?

He shakes his head.

ZIA (cont'd)

I'll see what I can do. Meet you here tomorrow at 7am?

## EXT. EDGE OF A NIGHT MARKET - LATE

Zia stands in the shadowy corner of an open air night market. Buildings soar up hundreds of feet above her, but it is still sixty or seventy stories to the ground.

Suspended on long cantilevers between two buildings is an open area, almost like a town square. The market is a vibrant place, bright and filled with SHOUTS, LAUGHTER, and BABBLE. The sound of ELECTRONIC MUSIC drifts over to Zia periodically.

Zia wears her black leather trench coat. She turns up the collar and runs a hand through her hair, artistically messing it up to make it match the crowd.

Zia reaches up to activate the Dust chip behind her ear. It glows green.

## RECEPTIONIST

Pascal's office.

## ZIA

It's Agent Makyna. Tell Pascal it's going to be a late one. I'll update him in the morning.

Zia disconnects the call. She steps around a column of dripping water as a low RUMBLE starts to shake the grated platform she stands on.

Zia looks at her feet, and through the floor, down sixty stories. She grimaces but shakes it off.

In a moment a LiteRail train whizzes by. Zia times her entrance into the night market to coincide with the disembarking passengers. No one notices her as she merges with the crowd.

## EXT. NIGHT MARKET - CONTINUOUS

Zia weaves her way through the crowd. Her eyes are alert, taking in every detail. She skirts some loud drunks and ignores a wolf whistle.

Zia steps off the main drag and goes down a side aisle. She stops at a shabby booth. A portly man, TOBIAS (50s), with several days stubble peppering his chin doses behind the counter. Some slightly broken robotic gizmos sit on a faded velvet pad in front of him.

Zia puts her hands on the counter and clears her throat. The man doesn't stir.

ZIA  
Tobias.

TOBIAS  
Hrumph...

Tobias grunts and starts out of sleep. He looks around for the sound and only slowly focuses on Zia. His eyes are bleary.

TOBIAS  
Oh no, it's you. I didn't do it.

Zia cocks her head and looks at him.

ZIA  
Guilty conscience, Tobias?

TOBIAS  
What? No! I didn't mean...

Tobias looks at her and seems to realize she is as close to joking as she'll ever get. He pads his pockets for his glasses.

TOBIAS  
What do you want?

ZIA  
I'm looking for some Dust.

TOBIAS  
Ah, and what are we in the market for then, sweetheart? Cognitive enhancers? Memory backups? Programs? Or maybe something a little more... personal?

As he speaks he gently touches Dust chips sitting on his counter. Cognitive enhancers are red, memory backups are green, programs are blue.

Zia shakes her head.

ZIA  
I'm not here as a buyer, Tobias.

He snorts.

TOBIAS  
Figured it was too good to be true.

ZIA  
 What I'm looking for is  
 Quintessence. And it's hot.

Tobias jerks back.

TOBIAS  
 I don't ever touch that black  
 market shit! Too hot if you ask me.  
 I ain't stupid enough to try shit  
 like that. This is a respectable  
 establishment.

Zia leans forward, switching to flattery.

ZIA  
 You're a shrewd business man,  
 Tobias.

He nods self-righteously.

ZIA (cont'd)  
 I know that someone with your...  
 standards, would never have to sink  
 that low... but, I'm sure that  
 someone in your position would hear  
 a thing or two, you know, being so  
 important to the community...

Tobias, purses his lips.

TOBIAS  
 Well, maybe I do hear a few  
 things... every now and then.

Zia leans in.

ZIA  
 This is new stuff. It's crystal  
 clear. Unmarked except for the Q.

Tobias' eyes grow wide. He recognizes the description.

TOBIAS  
 No. No, I ain't never heard of  
 anything like that.

ZIA  
 Tobias...

Zia shakes her head.

ZIA  
I know you better than that,  
Tobias.

TOBIAS  
I don't know--

Zia lunges forward and grabs the front of his shirt.

ZIA  
Who has them? Mikey? Scratch? The  
creep down in district seven?

TOBIAS  
I don't know! I don't know!

Zia tightens her hold.

TOBIAS (cont'd)  
Okay, okay! I heard some rumors  
down in seven but I don't know who  
scored the Dust. It might have just  
been talk. You know how it is.

Zia slowly relaxes her grip. She looks him in the eye,  
measuring him.

TOBIAS (cont'd)  
I swear that's all I know.

Zia decides he's telling the truth. She lets his shirt go.

ZIA  
Down in seven?

TOBIAS  
Yeah, but not Sumpter. He bit the  
dust, no pun intended, two weeks  
ago.

Zia sighs.

TOBIAS (cont'd)  
Long night ahead of you,  
sweetheart?

ZIA  
I'll manage.

TOBIAS  
You always do.

Zia points a finger at him.

ZIA

Call me if you hear any more rumors.

TOBIAS

You'll be the first to know.

(as a last though)

I heard Scratch might have had something cooking on the back burner but it didn't sound like it matched what you're looking for now.

ZIA

Thanks, Tobias.

Zia peels away from the booth and exits the night market. the farther she gets away from the brightly lit area the murkier the city gets. DRIPPING water replaces the sound of babble and music from the market.

Zia steps cautiously into a cage-like box and drags a grate across it with some difficulty. The floor of the elevator is also only a grid and the asphalt far below is visible.

Zia grits her teeth and hits a switch on the wall. With much metallic GRINDING the elevator starts to shake. Then it drops several inches unexpectedly.

Zia sucks in her breath, but the elevator descends smoothly after that. She lets out her breath. The farther down she travels the darker, dirtier, and smellier the city gets.

Zia pulls up the cuff of her coat and crosses the name 'Tobias' off her wrist unit. There are many names below his. She sighs.