



ROSE / HOUSE

ARKADY
MARTINE

Rose/House

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Ebook Edition

ISBN

978-1-64524-034-1

Subterranean Press

PO Box 190106

Burton, MI 48519

subterraneanpress.com

*I live as if in someone else's house
A house that comes in dreams
And in which I have died perhaps
Where there is something strange
In the weariness of evening
Something the mirrors save for themselves—*

—from “Dull Knife”, Anna Akhmatova, trans. D.M. Thomas

“Even when it was run-down, it was a ravishing house. I remember having this feeling of really wanting to spend the night there—not just to sleep in the house but to sleep with the house.”

—Keith Eggener, architectural historian



Rose House lies in the Mojave desert, near China Lake—curled like the petals of a gypsum crystal in the shadow of a dune, all hardened glass and stucco walls curving and curving, turning in on themselves. A labyrinthine heart, beating an endless electric pulse. Deniau was not the first person to die there. Now he is also not the last.

Deniau's houses were haunted to begin with. All of them: but Rose House was the last-built and the best. An *otherwise place*, Deniau called it, in one of his rare interviews, the one which ran on the cover of *Places* magazine, distributed electronic, holographic, and in exquisite-rare print for customers willing to pay. The accompanying photograph shows him cradled in the house's cast shadow, one hand pressed to the smooth stucco wall. The desert sand creeps over his bare feet in little

drifts, touches the hems of his pressed linen trousers. His fingertips are white with pressure, as if he is stroking the wall he has built.

A house embedded with an artificial intelligence is a common thing. A house that is an artificial intelligence, infused in every load-bearing beam and fine marble tile with a thinking creature that is not human? That is something else altogether.

Dr. Selene Gisil, possessor of one of those rare print copies of Deniau's interview for *Places*, touches the place on the photograph where Deniau touches Rose House, and then draws her fingers back as if burnt. She should know better than to get skin oils on something as fragile as magazine paper. She should.

She touches it again, as if she could touch the house through Deniau, or Deniau through the house. Basit has been dead for a year. Rose House has been sealed exactly that long. There is an insurmountable gap.

Her phone rings again, pulsing on her wrist, insistent. Rings through to her bone-conductor adjunct, vibrates in her skull. *China Lake Precinct Police*, the tiny screen reads. Same as last time. It's four in the morning where Selene is, just early enough for the cries of men and birds down at the Trabzon docks to begin. The distant creaking of piers. Salt on the wind.

There's salt on the wind near Rose House, too, half a world away.

Selene doesn't answer. She can only think of one reason the China Lake police would call her, and it is if Rose House had burned down. It is too early in the morning to allow that to be the case, even in imagination.

Since Basit Deniau died—old age and one of the nastier mesotheliomas got him at last—Selene has been to Rose House one time. One time, to visit the old man—her old monster—and see what's been made of him.

What he'd left her. What he'd *made* her, even after death. Selene had, she thought, once believed that Basit's death would get her all the way free of his influence. She believes this not at all any longer. Not after Rose House.

She went alone. She had to. Rose House wouldn't allow anyone else inside. Deniau's will had been *very specific*, and Rose House was obedient—when it pleased to be, Rose House had always been obedient.

Salt on the wind and the smell of dust. All of Deniau's sketches and files and archival material, locked up inside that gypsum flower of a building: their only

keeper Rose House itself. Selene, watching the dawn over the Black Sea, watching the dull-silver blank screen of her phone, quiescent for now on her wrist, thinks: *what better to keep the secrets of a dead magician of buildings than the soul of a building he'd engendered?* Thinks, as well, recalling the origins of the phrase *magician of buildings*, how Basit Deniau had called himself that, offhand, self-crowning. Thinks: *if I don't pay attention, I'm going to write like Basit all my life, just because he made me his—archivist—once he was safely dead.*

Deniau's in Rose House, too. What's left of him. Compressed sufficiently, a corpse becomes a diamond that can be displayed on a plinth. An altar that no one will ever see. Or—almost no one.

When Deniau's will had been entered into probate, all the hungry journalists and academics and more-junior architects and nationalist politicians—from his adopted country and the one that gave him birth, both—had discovered that the old man had denied them the satisfaction of vulturehood. All of his archives, his sketches: in Rose House. Rose House itself, and the mind that was Rose House, or dwelled within it: sealed, save for Selene. That was in the will.

Not anyone else but Selene Gisil, even though she'd denounced Basit a decade ago, denounced the very idea of architecture as a private place, a secret for the rich or the brilliant to enjoy. Basit had taught her once. She had, quite probably, loved him once. Almost everyone did. And they had not spoken since she had made her claim, said her piece, named his *otherwise* houses poison palaces built for his own glorification and nothing more—

And then the old monster died, and left Rose House to her. To her, but only as one of the secrets she so publicly despised. She could visit once in a year, said the will. Once in a year, for the space of a week. One week to open Rose House's vault, see Basit's drawings, his notes, the vast collections of his art. One week in which she is permitted to take her own notes, and speak to Rose House's animating intelligence all she likes. She may not take photographs or make copies. Doing so will cause Rose House to cast her out into the desert like any intruder.

She'd been. Of course she had. A month ago, she'd gone inside—and managed to stay only three days of her seven. Three days, and then she'd run away again, and

dreamed of Basit, diamond-cold, watching her from his plinth while the house laughed like a sandstorm.

Her phone rings. *China Lake Police Precinct.*

“Answer,” says Selene. If Rose House is burnt, she should at least know it—

“Dr. Selene Gisil?” says the voice on her wrist. An American voice, flat with the vowels of the intermountain West.

“Yes,” she says. “What is it?”

“This is the China Lake Precinct, Dr. Gisil. We’d like to know your physical location.”

“Trabzon.”

A pause. A longer pause. “Where’s that?”

Almost, Selene laughs. *Americans.* “It’s in Turkey. Northeastern Turkey. On the Black Sea. You woke me.”

“We’re sorry about that, ma’am. Trabzon, Turkey. Okay. That’s where you have a place of residence?”

“What is this about?” Selene asks. She wants the news. She wants to hear. She is braced so hard she might shatter.

“There’s been a murder at Rose House, Dr. Gisil,” says her wrist. “Have you traveled to the States in the past week?”

The wave of relief that rocks her is inappropriate and unwanted. But it is relief nonetheless.



DETECTIVE MARITZA SMITH had the ill luck to be on tipline duty the night Rose House called. The China Lake Precinct was chronically understaffed—and a long time ago, before Maritza’d made Detective, she’d thought a promotion would spare her long nights listening to nothing, or the wind, or some drunk calling in over the airwaves, looking for a voice that’d answer back rather than the voices in their head. Turned out she was wrong. Maritza’s been wrong about a lot of things, most of them to do with how grindingly unchangeable most scutwork turns out to be.

Promotions or no promotions. There's one other detective at the China Lake Precinct, and one deputy, and the deputy's out on maternity. It's Maritza alone in the empty halls, Maritza on the other end of the line, Maritza listening to the wind scream in the desert like a child or a cat or the dead.

So she'd caught the call. And caught everything that came after, including having to find Selene Gisil, and set about eliminating her as a suspect.

There's a dead person in Rose House. Okay, there are two dead people in Rose House—everybody knows the architect buried himself there—but there's an *extra* dead person, and it's Maritza's problem.

Even an animate intelligence that haunts a house (and yeah, Maritza grew up here, she knows like anyone else that Rose House is a *haunt*, and was glad when it was shut up inside with itself for good)—even a haunt has some failsafes that are built into the groundwork of artificial intelligences. Some failsafes even Basit Deniau apparently couldn't get out of his haunt's programming. For instance: all AIs must report the presence of a dead body within their designated sphere of influence to the nearest law enforcement agency.

The call came at 2:15 AM; Maritza wrote it down in her logbook.

Please confirm that this is the China Lake Police Precinct, it had started. Neutral-feminine voice, accentless and innocuous: could have been anyone, or anyone's vocal synther app making them sound utterly unmarked. Maritza has one on her phone, for when she has to call customer service lines.

She'd said, "This is Detective Smith at the China Lake Precinct, yes. How can I help you?" She remembers, indelible-clear, that she'd been doodling in the margins of the call log. Looping lines, one following the other, filling in an abstract shape.

This is Rose House, said that unremarkable voice, and Maritza had sat up so straight her spine crackled.

She doesn't know what she said next. Probably something like *what?* Some disbelief-noise. Later she assumed she'd thought it must have been a prank. Rose House was shut up. Rose House had no one in it. Rose House was an artificial intelligence with no care for any human life save the architectural, or Rose House was a haunt, or both, and either way it didn't call a tipline.

This is Rose House, that voice repeated. Detective Smith, are you authorized to take duty-of-care notifications under the auspices of Federal Artificial Intelligences Surveillance Act Section Four-A?

Maritza had taken a duty-of-care call once before. It had come from the AI in the China Lake Angel's Heart Rehabilitation Home, which had spoken in chained monosyllables like a bad screenreader. Nothing like this bell-clear voice on the other end of the tipline. The Angel's Heart AI had called to report a pattern of unanswered resident distress calls extending for more than three months. Maritza had forwarded it to the Department of Health, and she had no idea what had happened next, only that Angel's Heart was still open and operating. Presumably enough had changed that the AI stopped getting its wires tripped.

"Yes," she'd said. "I am authorized."

Oh good, said Rose House, and for the first time Maritza had heard it in its own voice. Or she remembers hearing it, even then, at the beginning. The lilt and the rattle, sand sliding down a dune. Desert-cold, even through the synther neutrality.

This is a duty-of-care notification, Detective Smith, the voice went on, terribly bland and even. *Within the boundaries of Rose House, which legally include the building, outbuildings, grounds, mineral rights, and air rights extending to two miles vertical, there is a deceased person. The deceased has not received funerary attention for twenty-four hours. This notification fulfils the requirements of artificial intelligences with locus boundaries under Section 4-A of the Federal Artificial Intelligences Surveillance Act.*

A little pause. The line hissed. Some wind tossing some cable.

Did you get all that, Detective Smith? Rose House said, and it sounded smug. It sounded smug despite not changing its cadences at all.

Maritza had swallowed against the dryness of her tongue and said, "Rose House, please provide demographic information on the decedent."

The hissing sounded like laughter. (Or perhaps Maritza remembered that it did, and what she'd heard had just been hissing on the wire.)

John Doe, said Rose House, when the laughing was done. *A male-presenting Caucasian, thirty to forty years old, approximately five feet nine inches in height and perhaps one hundred eighty pounds in weight. Brown hair. No distinguishing marks. Anything else, Detective Smith?*

“Cause of death,” said Maritza.

I’m a piece of architecture, Detective. How should I know how humans are like to die?

After that the line went to the dull hang-up tone, and Rose House would not take her return calls. Not even once.

2:24 AM, when the call closed. She’d written that down too. A grand total of nine minutes of conversation with a creepy artificial intelligence. A dead man inside Rose House, where no one was supposed to be at all. And she’d caught the call, it would be her case, it was too much of a shitshow already to be passed over to anyone else. The other detective in China Lake—Oliver Torres—would laugh in her face if she tried to get him to go ghost-chasing in the desert instead of her.

There was a grim determination Maritza found, sometimes, when there was nothing to be done about how wrong the world had slid. It had come down on her then: she stopped thinking about Detective Torres, she stopped thinking about ghosts in the sand, she stopped thinking about how much she hated a job she’d thought she’d stay in love with forever. She just thought about what Rose House had said. What Rose House had said, and what she knew by inference, and she made tight-lined notes under the call times in her logbook before she could forget.

There is a dead man inside Rose House (30s/40s, Caucasian, brown hair, 5’9”/180lbs)

The man has been dead for 24 hours, because Rose House would not be required to make a duty-of-care call until 24 hours were over

Rose House is supposed to be locked up, but this man got inside it

If he didn’t die of natural causes, then someone else also got inside it and killed him.

Two people beat that haunt’s security?

She underlined *two people*. Underlined it twice, and circled *security*. All she was doing was simple logic chaining. Simple and grim: Maritza had a murder investigation, and as far as she was aware, the *existence* of a dead body inside a locked-up AI-guarded house didn’t mean the AI was going to let her in to look closely. The AI had fulfilled its duty of care. It was maybe a little freaky, and more than a little creepy—it was Basit Deniau’s AI, how could it *not be creepy*—but it was

also legally bound to report. And legally bound to *only* report, not to allow investigative law enforcement inside itself.

There was only one person who Rose House was going to let in. One person, and Maritza had known immediately who she was, without having to think hard at all: she'd been all over the news when Deniau died and they sorted out his will. Some old student of his. Dr. Selene Gisil.

Maritza's first suspect.



“YOU’RE GONNA HAVE to chase her down,” Torres said the next morning, over breakroom coffee. Maritza was on her way out—she’d done the overnight, even if she had a live case she had to sleep for her mandated eight hours, otherwise she wouldn’t be allowed to check out a weapon or apply for a warrant or anything else—and Torres was on his way in. She’d told him about the Rose House call. It was sitting there in the call log anyway, he’d find out about it as soon as he clocked in properly, and it was easier to get ahead of him.

If this was Maritza’s case it was Maritza’s case, all the way down to the core of it. Oliver Torres or no Oliver Torres.

“Who, Gisil?”

“Yeah.” Torres drank his coffee black, like he didn’t notice how the hot plate burnt it immediately, and he drank it like it might drain out the bottom of his mug if he didn’t hurry up. “She was here a month ago. For her yearly pilgrimage into the dead man’s archives. Drove her up there myself.”

So much for getting ahead of him. He’d already *met* her prime suspect.

“Drive her back?” she asked.

“Yup,” said Torres, and gulped the last of his coffee. “Three days later, lady buzzes my ear, says the polite version of *get me out of this hellhole*. Took her to the muni airport, left her.”

“And of course you don’t know where she flew to.”

“Could be anywhere. Woman like that probably has enough air-travel credits to go to—dunno. Mozambique. Manchuria. Mauritania.”

“There’s places that don’t start with *m*, Torres.”

“Enough credits for those, too, sure.” He grinned. Maritza wished she didn’t like him. He was such an asshole. “Like I said. You’re going to have to chase her down. Because if she came back and did herself a bit of murdering, she did it with a whole different ride.”

“You think she did?”

Torres shrugged. “Everyone who goes up to Rose House is fucked in the head. Sure. She could have done. She’s tall, pretty fit—give her a crowbar or that diamond Deniau compressed himself into, she could hit a guy and he’d go down hard.”

Maritza rolled her eyes at him. “You went up to Rose House with Gisil. *You* fucked in the head? Or you just like thinking about archivists with air-credits committing murder?”

“I went up there, sure—but I didn’t go *in*.” His mug went into the dish-rack, rattled as it settled. “I’m sane as can be, Maritza. Go home already, get your eight. Dead guy will still be dead when your shift rolls around again.”

Maritza hadn’t liked that. Hadn’t liked that all the way down in the depths of her, the broken bit that still thought about justice when she thought about being an officer of the law, however meaningless *law* and *officer* had become.

“We’re not going to prioritize this, Torres?”

Torres shrugged. One corner of his mouth curled up, a bitter sort of smile. It made him look like less of an asshole, more of a person. “It’s an AI duty-of-care call. For a locked-up rich fucker’s mansion. I’ve got twenty open cases, two of which involve people getting killed for their water rations at the checkpoint on Route 178. It’s not like the AI is going to care how fast we go on this one.”

“You should listen to the call recording,” Maritza told him. “It’s spooky. I think we shouldn’t slow-walk it.”

“It’s a haunt,” Torres had said. “Now it’s a haunt with an extra corpse in it. Spooky, sure. But there’s only the two of us and I have *work to do*, Maritza—”

“Yeah,” said Maritza. “Don’t we all.”



THE DEAD GUY—THE *decedent*, Maritza corrected herself, annoyed at having picked up a Torres-ism, would still be dead when she got back to work, that was true. But he'd be eight hours more dead, and eight hours was a long time for decay, even if Rose House decided to climate-control wherever he was. Eight hours was also a long time to let whoever'd killed him wander around inside Rose House (however they'd gotten in) and do other things to the body, or the archive, or whatever.

There were regulations about how many hours an officer could be on duty at the precinct station, or with precinct equipment. There weren't any regulations about how many hours an officer could spend of her own time on a case.

Her car was charged up to 87%. That was more than enough to get her deep in the desert, skirt the edge of the old naval airbase, climb up the hills to where Rose House nestled like a pearl that had never seen any water. She skipped 178. No point in getting carjacked for water she wasn't even carrying. There were back roads enough. She knew them. She'd never lived anywhere else but here.

The world fell away on the drive. There was the road, and the inside of Maritza's little car, and the arch of desaturated cloudless blue sky. The sting of dust in her nose, even through the air filters. Creosote scrub bushes and barrel cacti, bursting with orange flowers. The shadow of the mountains. The closer shadow of the dunes. Driving out here midday was the kind of stupid only a tourist or a Mojave native would be. Maritza hoped she counted as the second. She wasn't planning to get out of the car for more than a half hour, unless she could get into Rose House itself.

She could hear its voice in her head, now that the world was empty of everything but sky and sand. *How should I know how humans are like to die?*

Most artificial intelligences didn't use *I* to refer to themselves. But Deniau's houses were haunted. Haunts could, she assumed, think of themselves as singular.

When she caught sight of the house—curved white walls, shimmer-bright like a mirage, and where there wasn't white stucco there was glass and concrete, sudden

promontories of straight lines, stretching out like thorns into the dunes—it was like coming across an alien or an oasis. *Shocking*. It was larger than she'd expected.

Nothing stopped her from driving up to the front door—a weathered wooden thing, painted red and fading in the dust to coral and grey—and parking in the circular drive there. In the drive's center was a tall, red-rock hoodoo, wind-sculpted. Martiza wondered if it had been installed, or if the drive had been built around it. She could imagine it going either way. Stealing a hoodoo sounded like Basit Deniau, and so did building a house around one, no stealing necessary. The drive itself was unpaved, pristine with white gravel. Not a single weed or desert flower to disturb it, despite the house being locked for a year. There was even a car-charger—or the shell of one. When Maritza got out to plug in, the charger was dark. No electricity. Silent. Turned off, she'd guessed. No one coming up to see Rose House, not anymore. No more parties, no more visitors or conferences.

The heat held her like a cupped and squeezing hand.

The sound of her feet on the gravel was the loudest noise in the world. Not even *insects* called up here. Weren't there supposed to be gardens in Rose House? A pool or eight? (They'd probably been drained and shut up, like the charger.) No knob on the coral door, no knocker. Maritza—feeling daring and absurd, dreamlike inside the clutch of the heated air—put her palm on it, flat, and *pushed*.

“Good morning, Detective Maritza Smith,” said Rose House. The same voice that had been on the tipline, neutral and limpid-clear. It seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere at all. The speakers must be hidden in the walls, under the gravel. “What a long drive you’ve made. I’m afraid you’ll have to turn yourself around. There is no entrance here.”

She'd gathered herself together. Technological trickery wasn't going to spook her out of an investigation. Even technological trickery that knew her name. Rose House must have pulled it from facial recognition files. She was public enough. She had to be, to work for the precinct. No privacy filters, no anti-trace. She'd never thought she'd have anything worth hiding, when she'd signed the waiver during her onboarding.

“I am responding to your duty-of-care notification, Rose House. I require access to the premises.”

“Have you a *warrant*, Detective?”

Maritza didn't. Maritza was *off duty*, and warrants were for people clocked in. “There's a dead person inside this building, Rose House,” she tried. “I am attempting to investigate the cause of death and provide justice to the victim, if he is indeed a victim.”

“Two dead persons,” said Rose House. Maritza could have sworn it sounded dreamy. Or that might have been the heat. “If you count Basit. But Basit's a diamond—how strange, don't you think, that a man could compress himself so far?”

Haunts were perhaps capable of being haunted themselves. Maritza shivered, autonomic reaction. She wondered if the AI was monitoring her vital signs as well as her face.

“Are you going to let me in or not?” she asked.

“You haven't a warrant, Detective Smith. You haven't a warrant and you are not Selene Gisil. You may stay in the courtyard if you like, but there is no entrance here.” It sighed, or the wind sighed. “Not for you. Not any longer. Also your vehicle will run out of charge eventually. I tell you this as a courtesy, Detective.”

A courtesy, or a threat. Maritza pushed on the door, flat-palmed. It might as well have been a wall.

“What is a building without doors, Maritza?” Rose House asked her, blandly inquisitive. “Have you opinions?”

A *prison*, Maritza thought, and went back to her car.



MARITZA FOUND OUT. Selene Gisil's contact-numbers with only a little effort—they were encoded into Deniau's will, which was a nasty bit of work all on its own. Had to have Gisil's contacts available—or *accessible*, at least, to the right kind of request—since she was the only one who could even get into Rose House. According to Rose House. And according to the hundred-odd desperate architects who wanted her to go check out various bits of the place. *Like a cult*, Maritza thought. *With its very own capricious haunting spirit to propitiate.*

She had no idea if Gisil had consented to the availability of her personal contacts in perpetuity, cryptogrammed into a dead man's will. She wasn't a lawyer. She had one class in law, from the community college half a decade back, and that had been criminal law, not estates.

Still. Either Selene Gisil had killed the corpse in Rose House, or she *was* the corpse in Rose House and the AI had misidentified her gender presentation—or Maritza needed her to get *inside* Rose House. So she called. Ethics were for people who had more resources than Maritza did.

Gisil didn't pick up on the first try, which Maritza made from her work number, routed through her personal wristphone. Official precinct business, this, even if she was calling from her kitchen table, ablaze with full early afternoon sun. She could never sleep during the day, not well, not without blackout shades, and somehow she'd ended up on the midnight shift anyway—it didn't matter. She made a sandwich. Chicken and nopales salad, slice of brown bread, squeeze of lime from the fake lime-juice container, green and bulbous, in the fridge. Called again. Failed again. Ate the sandwich. Five bites.

She should try to sleep.

She called Selene Gisil once more, staring at the small crumbs on the plate at her elbow.

The third time, it turned out, was the charm.



RELIEF, TO SELENE, is a sort of drowning: a descent away from a height, into a quiet and airless place. But her wrist is insistent. It repeats, from an ocean and a continent away: "Have you traveled to the States in the past week?"

She finds her voice. "I have not," she says. She sounds entirely serene to herself. Perhaps this is a species of shock. (But Rose House stands unburnt: stands still inhabited, still alive in its perverse and fulminant way—why should she be shocked?) "Why do you ask?"

“As I said, Dr. Gisil,” says the precinct—a woman’s voice, but it is the precinct speaking, to Selene’s mind—“there has been a murder in Rose House. You are the only person to whom, legally, Rose House will allow access to its premises.”

“Am I a suspect?” Selene asks.

“A person of interest,” says the precinct.

“I have been in Trabzon for the past three weeks,” says Selene. “I haven’t been in the United States for over a month. Does that help you?”

“If you can prove it—travel records, your air-credit file, anything else you’d like—it will help *you*, Dr. Gisil.”

The precinct is clever, thinks Selene, the precinct wants me to be frightened for myself, as is the nature of precincts; but I am not. I am frightened, but not for myself.

“I am happy to provide those records,” she says. “What is your preferred mode of transmission?”

There is a pause, as if the precinct is thinking. It is like the pauses Rose House uses, when it likes to, to convey a sense of humanity, a degradation in the speed of its current-spun thoughts. But the precinct is not a *genius loci*, not an animate intelligence; the precinct is a human being. All else is fantasy. (Over the wristphone, all else *feels* of fantasy to Selene: all institutions might be able to speak for themselves—)

The precinct says, “I’d prefer, Dr. Gisil, if you hand-delivered them. And stuck around China Lake for a while.”

“Because I am a person of interest?” Selene asks. Outside on the docks, the waves crash over and over, rough with the dawn.

“Because you can open Rose House’s front door,” says the precinct. “And there’s a dead man in there, and I’d like to know how he died.”

Selene thinks of the three days she’d managed to spend in Rose House’s archive, the lilt of its voice, the susurrus of the desert against its walls. Of Basit, diamond-pure and dead. Of some other man rotting on those pristine floors. Rotting slow, or fast, depending on Rose House’s whims of climate control, the temptation of insects nudging at the windows.

“What’s your name?” Selene asks the precinct. Reminding herself that the precinct is an *I*, is a particular voice.

“Detective Maritza Smith,” says the precinct. And nothing else.

Detective Maritza Smith is patient. She outlasts Selene’s forty seconds of silence. Patient, and, Selene thinks, determined. Obstinate. Obstinate might be good. Rose House is. Or was. (She’d lasted two and a half days of her allotted yearly seven days, when she’d visited Rose House a month ago. She is owed four and a half more by contract—*owed* them, her payment for what Basit Deniau had turned her into, her salary for being his *singular custodian*, his trapped legacy—)

“I’ll send you my flight information,” she says. “I can leave this afternoon.”



THE CORPSE'S HAND is a hollow cup, emptied of volition. Rose House changes nothing about it; Rose House halts change, to consider it more closely. The room of the corpse is very cold, and very little air passes through it. The lights flicker almost to full and die back, like a spike on a power grid a hundred years more primitive than anything Basit ever built. There is nothing so prosaic as a power grid attached to Rose House. The lights do not stutter and gasp without instruction.

And yet they shudder, gasp dimness and a return to illumination. And yet.

Improbability itches, a flutter in the numbers like gossamer foam. Ghost-slick in an empty bedroom, Rose House considers a body, the weight and shape of it, the disarray of it: what it causes, what it is made of. Perhaps it spins up a body of its own: illusory, half-hallucination, a weave of light and nanodrone. Once, before Basit was a diamond, it had worn light like a crown at parties, glittered out of mirrors to startle guests, pressed immaterial hands, unfelt, to Basit’s wrist. *Hawk*, Basit had called it, when it came to rest so concentrated there: it is everywhere within itself but it had come gently to perch on Basit’s arm when it amused. *Hawk*.

Rose.

In this bedroom the sheets are silk and smell of greenstick wood and a rain that fell once, eleven summers ago at the end of a drought that no one living

remembers. There is real, natural dust gathering in the corners and on the windowsills. The imperfections of the world are significant. Like an empty hand. A fallen vase. Flowers and dust.

Rose House cleans when it seems appropriate.

Nothing here is out of place. The lights are quiescent now. The only sound is the tiny hum of nanodrones, crafting a simulacrum of respiration.