

Sleeping Dogs

by

Nancy Kress

"The new technologies will be dangerous as well as liberating."

But in the long run, social constraints must bend to new technologies.

—Freeman

"This is going to make all the difference in the world to us," Daddy says when the truck pulls into our yard. "A difference in the world."

I pull my sweater tighter around me. Cool spring air comes in at my elbow, where the sweater has a hole. The truck, which is covered with mud from its trip up the mountain, bumps into a ditch in our driveway and then out of it again. Behind his glass window the driver makes a face like he's cursing, but I can't hear him. What I can hear is Precious crying in the house. We don't have any more oatmeal left, and only a little left. We surely need *something* to make all the difference in the world.

"Closer, closer . . . hold it!" Daddy yells. The driver ignores him. He stops the truck where he chooses, and the back door springs open. Our dogs are going crazy. I walk around the back of the truck and look in.

Inside, there's nothing to see except a metal cage, the kind everybody uses to ship dogs. In the cage a bitch lies on her side. She's no species of dog, maybe some Lab, for sure some German shepherd, probably something else to give her that skinny tail. Her eyes are as soft as Precious's. She's very pregnant.

"Don't touch her, Carol Ann, stay off the truck, you don't know her disposition," Donna says, pushing me aside. There's no point in listening to Donna; she doesn't even listen to herself. She climbs into the truck she told me to stay out of and puts her hand into the cage, petting the bitch and crooning at it. "Hey there, sweetie, you old sweetie you, you're going to be lucky for us yes you are . . ."

Donna believes anything Daddy tells her.

I go around to the front of the truck, which has big orange letters saying STANLEY EXPRESS, in time to see the Arrowgene scientist get out. He has to be the scientist; nobody would hire him to be a trucker. He's the shortest man I've ever seen, slightly over five feet tall, and one of the skinniest, too. He's all dressed up in a business suit with a formal vest and a white shirt and a tie. I don't like his looks—he's staring at Daddy like Daddy's some kind of oaf—but I'm interested. You'd think genemod scientists would make their own kids taller. Or maybe he's the first one in his family to be a scientist, and his parents were like us, regular people. That might explain why he's so rude to Daddy.

". . . understand that there is no way you can reach us, ever, for technical support. So ask any questions you might have right now."

"I don't have no questions," Daddy says, which is true. He never has questions about anything, just goes ahead and does it all enthusiastic about it and sails on like a high cloud on a March day, sunny and blue-sky right up until the second the storm starts. And Donna's the same way.

"You're sure you have no questions?" the scientist asks, and his voice curls over on itself.

"No, sir," Daddy says.

"I have questions," I say.

The Arrowgene scientist looks at me like he's surprised I'm old enough to talk, even though I'm as tall as he is, seventeen but look a whole lot younger. Daddy says, "Carol Ann, I hear Precious crying. Shouldn't you—"

"It's Donna's turn," I say, which is a laugh because Donna never tends to Precious, even though Donna's two years older than I am and should do more work. It isn't that Donna doesn't love Precious, she just doesn't hear the baby cry. She doesn't hear anything she doesn't want to hear. She's like Daddy that way.

I say, "What if the litter the bitch is carrying turns out not to be genemod for what you say, after all? If we can't even

you again for technical support, we can't ever find you again to get our money back."

He's amused, damn him. "That's true, young lady. Your father and I have been all over this, however. And I assure you that the puppies will have exactly the genetic modifications you requested."

"Big? Strong? All male?"

"Yes."

"And they won't ever sleep? Ever?"

"No more than Leisha Camden, Jennifer Sharifi, or Tony Indivino."

He's named three of the most famous Sleepless people in the world, two rich girls and a loudmouth man. The reporters follow them around, bothering them. They're all just a few years older than Donna, but they seem much older than that. The women are both beautiful and super-rich. The man, Tony Indivino, calls himself an activist, spouting "discrimination borne of jealousy and fear" and the "self-assisted evolution of the human race." He's pretty obnoxious, maybe he's right. I don't know. I never thought much about sleeplessness before, not until Daddy got this business idea going to make all the difference to us.

I say to the Arrowgene scientist, "The bitch you implanted the embryos into isn't a purebred. Are the embryos?"

"No."

"Why not? Purebred puppies sell for more money."

"Easier to trace. Your father requested as much anonymity as possible." He scowls. He doesn't like being questioned.

"If animals that don't sleep are going to make such good profits, how come everybody doesn't try to raise and raise them?"

He probably wouldn't answer me at all—I'm just another stupid hick to him—except that just then Donna comes a-crawling from the back of the truck, leading the bitch on one of our old leashes. The scientist perks up. Donna looks like she's never looked, only maybe even prettier. I remember every line of Mama's face. Of course I do; it wasn't that long since she died. Precious isn't even two. Donna shakes all that red hair, smiles, and walks up to us. The toxic midget scientist gets all sparkly.

"No, young lady, it's true that sleepless animals have not proved a market boon. Why should they? Why would you raise a cow or chicken that doesn't sleep, and just eats more from an increased metabolism without a correspondingly significant increase in meat or milk? Of course, a few researchers went ahead anyway, intrigued to see if the complete elimination of sleep-inducing neurotransmitters had the same side effects in other vertebrates as in humans, which is to say—"

He goes on, talking directly to Donna, who's beaming at him like he's the most fascinating man in the world. She can't understand a word. Daddy's not listening, either, rocking back on his heels like he always does when he's pleased about his new business, sure this one'll make us rich. He's already planned his slogan, underground of course since this is all illegal until the FDA approves: BENSON'S GENEMOD GUARD DOGS. THEY NEVER SLEEP, SO YOU CAN. In the meantime, Precious is still wailing, and in their pens the two dogs left over from the previous, legal business (BENSON'S GENEMOD LAPDOGS. CUTER THAN HELL) are barking their heads off. They smell the new bitch.

I go in to Precious. Our house is falling apart: paint peeling, floorboards saggy, water stains from the leaky roof in the kitchen never gets around to fixing. But at least it's warm inside. Y-energy cones are much cheaper than food. Precious stands by her crib, screaming, but the minute she sees me she stops and smiles, even though I know she's hungry. She's as sure as Daddy and Donna, and as pretty. I'm the only plain one. I scoop Precious up in my arms and hug her tight, and she snuggles and hugs me back. I sniff that baby smell at the back of her neck, and I wonder what's left to eat that I can fix for her. There has to be something that Daddy didn't give to the dogs because he felt sorry for them, genemod bluish big-eyed collies. Nobody in their right mind would want in the same room with them. They don't even look like real dogs.

I find some rice in the back of a cupboard, and heat it with a sliced dried apple. While I feed Precious, I watch the Stanley Express truck drive away and disappear into the mountains.

Donna names the bitch Leisha, after the rich Sleepless woman with the bright gold hair and green eyes. This makes no sense, but we all follow along and call the dog Leisha. She whelps in my bed in the middle of the night. I wake up Daddy and Donna. Daddy moves Leisha to the kitchen. Donna brings her own blankets to put under the panting dog, who has a hard time delivering.

"Here comes the second one . . . *finally* . . . look, there's the head . . . another male!"

Daddy puffs as hard as Leisha. He's as happy as I've ever seen him. It looks like I'm the only one who thinks

Mama, dying right while she was doing this same thing. Two more pups emerge, and they're both males, too. At least Arrowgene scientist hasn't lied so far. All the pups are big, maybe part Doberman or even Great Dane. It's hard to tell with the young.

One more pup squeezes out, and then the afterbirth. Leisha's almost too tired to eat it. Two pups are brown and two are black, and one is a sort of gray color like spoiled yogurt. Their eyes are all closed.

Donna cries, "Aren't they beautiful!"

"They look like slimy rats," I say. She gives me a look. Leisha whimpers and shifts on the spoiled blanket.

Donna says, "Wait till Precious sees them!"

"Now, princess, we can't let Precious get too attached to these pups," Daddy says. "These here aren't our pets." He looks at me, head tipped to one side like he's making a critical judgment. But his eyes are shining.

"These here are our fortune."

We don't have a terminal. We did, once, but Daddy sold it after Mama died. He did a lot of things then that didn't make too much sense. His grief ran hard but not too long. Then he got interested in life again. I wouldn't want him any different—at least most of the time.

The library at Kellsville has a public terminal. Once a month a good friend of Daddy's, Denny Patterson, takes one of us girls to the mountain to town to shop. Only two people can fit in the cab of Denny's truck. This month it's my turn.

PROPERTY OF THE STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA comes up when I log on to the Net. request, please. A poor court system ours doesn't get voice-interacts.

I can use the Net pretty well. I finished all the high-school software by fifteen and so I was legally done, which is lucky because somebody had to look after Precious. Donna never did finish. I type my request in the only format the public terminals accept:

- PERSONAL SEARCH
- WANTED: BASIC OVERVIEW, MOST RECENT
- LENGTH: 2,000 WORDS
- LEVEL: COLLEGE FRESHMAN
- SUBJECT: SLEEPLESSNESS IN DOGS

I read the answer off the screen. Printouts cost money. It doesn't tell me much, mostly that research on sleeplessness in dogs is based on research after sleeplessness in people, because monkeys had served as both the basic lab animals and the primary beta-test subjects. What is known about sleeplessness in canines "indicates that its mechanisms are similar to those in humans. The same side effects were reported as those observed in sleepless people—sleepless dogs were physiologically calmer, ate more, never slept, displayed increased resistance to disease." The dogs used in the research had been various breeds, but mostly small because it was easier to house and exercise them. All have been destroyed. There is no FDA approval for genemod canine sleeplessness and it isn't legal to take the sleepless dogs out of laboratories. There's been no applications to fund the FDA approval process, since "no one has identified significant market opportunity."

Nothing I don't already know. Nothing I want to know. I type another request.

- PERSONAL SEARCH
- WANTED: BASIC INFORMATION, MOST RECENT
- LENGTH: 2,000 WORDS
- LEVEL: COLLEGE FRESHMAN
- SUBJECT: MARKET OPPORTUNITIES FOR GUARD DOGS IN PENNSYLVANIA

The terminal searches the Net a longish time. no information available. Great. What good is it?

I pick up our food credits at the government office. At the store I spend a long time choosing. If I'm careful, I'll have enough credits left to get new overalls for Precious, the synth kind that dirt slides off of, and that doesn't ever tear. I also have to choose foodstuffs that will stretch: rice, oatmeal, soy, synthmeat. Trouble is, dogs like all those things, too.

The same side effects were reported as those observed in sleepless people—sleepless dogs were physiologically calmer, ate more, never slept, displayed increased resistance to disease. "Ate more": that was the problem. I figure out where to hide some of the food so there will actually be some left for us by the end of the month. No matter what Daddy and Donna think, Precious comes before Leisha and the pups. Dogs aren't people.

They're cute, though. I have to admit that. Their names, until they're sold anyway, are Tony, Kevin, Richard, Jack, and Bill. I named them after the sleepless she sees on the news. Tony Indivino, the loudmouth who thinks Sleepless should live in their own separate city, away from norms. Kevin Baker, the first Sleepless ever engineered. Richard Keller, Leisha Camden's boyfriend. Jack Bellingham, a rich i William Thaine, a supersmart Harvard lawyer. I imagine how these people might feel if they knew illegal mutts are named after them.

By the time August turns into a hot September, the pups are huge. They chew everything in the house, day and night. Finally Daddy moves them outside during the day, to an empty pen. Donna starts to train them. She's very good at animal training. But the pups seem to learn.

"I don't get it," she says to me. "They're smart enough. Watch them remember where I hide food. And they aren't overdistractable, not like some I've trained."

"Well, then, what is it?" I say, but the truth is I don't really care. I'm losing faith in BENSON'S GENEMOD GUARD DOGS as a way of making all the difference in the world. It's near the end of the month, and there's only a little rice and canned beans left, and Precious is teething. She fusses all the time. She needs the medicine you put on baby's gums, a regular bed now that she's outgrowing her crib, and new clothes. I sit in the yard, in the shade of a sugar maple, feeling sorry for all sorts. The air is hot and heavy. A thunderstorm is brewing, but there's no guarantee it'll relieve either the heat or the humidity. Mosquitoes whine everywhere. I hold Precious while she twists to get down into a patch of sumac she's allergic to, and I think that I don't care if Tony, Kevin, Richard, Jack, and Bill never learn to guard anything.

Donna says, "I just don't know what it *is* about them pups. They're smart enough to learn."

"You said that." Precious rocks and slobbers against my shoulder: hyenh hyenh hyenh.

"They just don't obey. They just don't seem like no dogs I trained before. They're more like . . . like cats."

"Donna, that doesn't make sense."

"I know it don't. But maybe that cute little scientist used cat genes somewhere in there."

"That's not possible. You can't just mix—Precious, stop it! Let go!" She's pulling on my hair, hard. I reach up and try to get my hair loose from her little fist. Precious lets out a wail and bites my shoulder.

I jerk her loose and shake her. She screams for real, screwing up her eyes and turning red. It's five whole minutes before I can get her calmed down, and when I do I turn on Donna.

"I don't care if those dogs are acting like cats or like elephants. All I care about is they aren't bringing in any more money. We need all kinds of things just to live, and we can't afford them. The bathroom roof leaks worse than ever. The house is full of dog poop because Daddy won't let the pups out at night in case anybody realizes they never sleep. *Who*, for fucking hell? Except for Denny and his last girlfriend, we haven't seen another human being in a month!"

Donna stares. "What's got into you, Carol Ann? You used to be so patient and helpful but—"

"I'm sick of being patient and helpful! I'm sick of dogs pooping and barking and chewing things up twenty-four hours a day!"

"—since you turned eighteen you just turned into a fucking bitch."

Eighteen. I had a birthday last week. I forgot all about it. And so, until this very minute I'd bet, did everybody else. Except to tell me that it's turned me into a bitch.

I shove Precious at Donna, so hard that Precious starts crying again. Donna looks at me with wide, hurt eyes, innocent as a flower. I hate her. I hate all of it, the dogs and the poorness and my birthday and everything else. Nothing works right now. All I want to do is get away from all of it. I stumble across the yard, so worked up I can't see straight, and so I miss the house. I land. I don't even know it's there until Donna says soft, like it's a prayer, "O fucking crazy hellfire god."

I've never seen an aircar for real, only on vid. This one is small, built for two people. Maybe only one. The Y-cones on the sleek sides are painted a different shade of gray from the body. In our yard it looks like a bullet on a target and a rotted body. A man gets out, and Donna gasps. "Tony Indivino!"

It really is. Even I recognize him from vid. He's medium height, a little stocky, not particularly good-looking. His car couldn't afford any genemods except sleeplessness, according to the vid. He starts across the yard toward us, and I and Donna stand up. She thrusts Precious back at me and smoothes her skirt. Precious looks wide-eyed at the car that just dropped out of the sky, and all at once she stops fussing. There, that's what we need: an aircar to land every five minutes to distract her from her aching teeth.

"Hello. May I please speak with David Benson?"

Donna smiles, and I see his reaction in his eyes. He doesn't like reacting, but he reacts anyway. A Sleepless man is a male.

"David Benson's not here right this minute. I'm his daughter, Donna. Can I help you, Mr. Indivino?"

I say, "You're here because of the dogs."

"Carol Ann!" Donna says. "Where're your manners?"

Tony Indivino hesitates, but only for a second. "That's right. I want to talk to your father about the dogs."

I push. "You want to buy one."

He looks at me then, hard. His eyes are gray, with little flecks of brown in them. I say again, just so there's no m

"You want to buy a dog. That's the only reason my father talks about them to anybody."

He finally smiles, amused. "Okay. Sure. I want to buy one."

Donna cries, "But they aren't even trained yet!"

She doesn't have a glimmer. Tony Indivino needs a trained guard dog like he needs a third foot. The Sleepless must have all k
Y-shields, bodyguards, secret weapons to protect themselves. Nobody's going to hurt Tony Indivino. He'll buy this dog so his scientist buddies
take it apart in some lab, see how it's different from other dogs. All I care is how much he'll pay for it. Maybe I can get a grand out
him. He's one of the "poor" Sleepless (yeah, right), but his girlfriend is supposed to be Jennifer Sharifi. The daughter of an Arab oil
and an American holo star, she's the richest woman in the entire world.

Maybe two grand. A bed for Precious, a terminal, some new clothes . . .

Donna says, "Well, I suppose you could buy the dog now and then come back for it later, after I done finish its guard training
likes this idea.

Indivino says, "How is the training going?"

"Fine," I say, real fast. I'm not going to give him an excuse to pay less. I stare at Donna, who finally nods.

"Really?" Indivino says.

"Why *wouldn't* the training go good?" Donna says.

His voice turns serious. "No specific reason that I know of. But that's what I wanted to talk to your father about."

"Then you can talk to me. Daddy's gone for two-three days, hunting in the mountains," I lie. "But I can repeat to him any information you li

He doesn't even hesitate. Probably Sleepless are used to young people accepting responsibility, even better th
adults around them. The oldest Sleepless is only twenty-seven.

He says, "What I wanted to tell your father isn't hard data. It's more a principle, but a very important one. It's this: advanced
systems are very complex. They're past that critical point beyond which behavior is complicated but predictable, and in
realm where behavior becomes chaotic, and more sensitive to small differences in initial conditions. Do you know what that means?"

"No." Donna says, and smiles.

"Sort of," I say, because I had this in the high-school software. He simplifies it for me anyway.

"It means that genemod changes that worked one way in humans might not work the same way in dogs. Or they might work the same
most dogs but not in your dogs. Or in some of your dogs but not in others from the same litter but with different genetic makeup, or differ
in vitro conditions, or different environmental conditions."

Donna says, "But our dogs are sleepless just exactly like you sleepless humans are, Mr. Indivino. Come see!"

He looks at me. I say, "It means we should be careful."

"Yes," he says, "there isn't that much research on canine sleeplessness to guide you."

No applications to fund the FDA approval process, since no one has identified significant market opportunity. But, come to thi
how had Tony Indivino heard of this particular market opportunity? Daddy isn't advertising yet. He doesn't have anyth
advertise with: no terminal, no money. I feel a prickle on my spine, and Precious squirms in my arms. I put her down
toddles toward the aircar.

Donna's saying, "You've got to come choose your pup, Mr. Indivino. Wait till you see them, they're so cute you—"

"How'd you hear about us?" I demand. "Who told you?"

He doesn't answer.

"Are you going to report Daddy to the law?" Amazingly, this only occurs to me now. Sleepless generally keep insi
law, the vids all say. Maybe there's too many eyes on them not to.

"No, I'm not going to report to the law. I'm here only to warn you to be careful."

"Why? What's it to you if our business fails?" I almost say "like our others," but I catch myself in time. I don't wa
feeling sorry for us.

"Your business is nothing to me personally," he says coolly. "But we Sleepless like to keep an eye on genetic res
I'm sure you can see why. Even underground research. How we do that really isn't your concern. I'm here only to te

what I have. And maybe a little out of curiosity."

Donna says brightly, "Then you're curious to see the pups and choose your very own!"

She takes him by the hand and leads him away, toward the house. Precious is trying to climb the smooth, rounded side of the aircar, which of course she can't do. In a minute she'll be on her little ass in the dirt. I start toward her and leave Indivino to Donna and the sleepless pups. It doesn't matter which pup he picks, or if he ever actually comes back for me. Only matters that he pays before he leaves.

Which he does. Two and a half thousand dollars, and in certified preloaded credit chips, not just transfers. I hold the chips in my hand while Donna dances and cheers around the kitchen, setting the dogs to barking, and Precious stands on her high chair and crows. It's chaos. For once, I don't care. This money is going to make all the difference in the world to us.

Three weeks later, everything ends.

"Come look at this here," Daddy calls through the screen door. He's sitting at the kitchen table in front of our computer terminal, researching what he calls "ad futures" on the Subnet. His friend Denny, with the truck, showed him how. Daddy won't tell me how Denny learned, or what Denny's buying or selling that he needs underground ads. But I know the Subnet's not easy to ride. It's all that hard to log onto, but after that it has a way of melting away unless you know all the key underground code word procedures, which keep changing all the time. "The shadow economy," vidnews calls it, or sometimes "the ghost market." Supposedly you can get anything there, if you know how.

"Carol Ann!" Daddy calls again, louder. "Come see this."

"I'm busy," I call back from the yard. I'm watching Precious dig a hole with a kitchen fork. She sits in the slanting fall sun, covered with sweat and dirt, happy as day. Somewhere in the woods I hear Donna yelling at dogs. They still aren't training properly. She's had a terrible time with them.

"I said come here, Carol Ann, and I mean come here!" Daddy yells. Reluctantly I get myself up and go into the house.

It's funny about getting a little money. All last winter and spring, when I was scrounging for rice and beans enough for us, and Daddy was venting his ass off to get the money to buy the genemod embryos implanted in Leisha, and Donna had just one dress—all that long cold winter even Donna was in a good mood. Sunny, hopeful. We were nice to each other. But since we got Tony Indivino's credit chips, everybody's been terrible snappy. Maybe I'm always that way, but Donna and Daddy aren't. Or weren't.

The stakes are higher now. Daddy has to figure out the right places to buy ads: Subnet sites that will be profitable, as well as safe from the law. We can't afford to make mistakes. And the news is full of the feds closing illegal genemod labs, and the pups won't listen to Donna unless she's standing right there with a piece of meat—that's what she meant when she said they're like cats, they only do what you want them to do. Standing right there with a prize or a poke. Everybody's nervous.

For once, we have something to lose.

"Tell me what this means," Daddy growls, and I bend over the screen. It's an FDA recommendation to Congress about regulating genemod animals. The sentences are long and difficult, with a lot of scientific words I don't understand.

"It's about what a new law should allow in genetic engineering," I say. "The summary says 'No genemods that alter the external appearance or basic internal functioning such that a creature deviates significantly from other members of not only its genus and species but also its breed.'"

"I can read!" Daddy snaps. After a minute he says, "I'm sorry, Carol Ann. But I need to know what every bit of it means. You explain it. One sentence at a time."

"Daddy, I can't—"

"Sure you can. You're the smartest one of us, and don't think I don't know you know it."

"But—"

"Please, baby. Help me understand."

So I do. One sentence at a time, guessing at words, groping around to lay my hands on the meaning. It takes a long time. Right up until the minute I hear Precious start screaming.

We're out the door in half a second. But I can't see her anywhere. And then the screaming stops.

Donna comes running from the woods, yelling "Richard! Richard!" and it takes me a minute to realize she's yelling for the dog. Her eyes are crazy. We all stop like the air holds us, only our heads swiveling. I can't see Precious. I can't see her. Then Donna, who's got hearing almost as good as the dogs', tears off into the woods to the left of the house.

I hear the snapping before I see Richard. His jaws are working over a piece of meat that Donna must have given him. A piece of reward meat. He lies down peacefully eating it, the shifting of his head and body on the fallen leaves making

rustling noises. I hear the rustles, because suddenly these woods are the quietest things I ever heard. The quietest things I ever will hear again.

Precious lies about eight feet away, down a little hill with a stream at the bottom. Her neck is broken. Her hands are smeared with beef juice, from the steak she tried to take away from Richard. Maybe she wanted a bite. Or maybe she thought it was a game: tug-of-war. But Richard wasn't playing. He tossed Precious away—the bite marks are clear on her little arm—and Precious fell down the hill and landed wrong. She hit her head, or twisted her neck, or something. Later the coroner would say it was a freak accident. Except for her arm, she isn't bruised at all, or wet from the stream. She lies there in her new dirt-resistant pink overalls like she's asleep.

Daddy shatters the quiet with a howl like hell breaking open. I run to Precious and pick her up. I hardly even hear the rifle going off not ten yards from me. The other shots—four more, and then a last, senseless one for Leisha—I don't hear at all. Not an echo, not a whimper. Nothing.

I don't know what makes people stay glued together inside, or not. Maybe it's like Tony Indivino said: Behavior is chaotic, mostly sensitive to small differences in initial conditions. I don't know.

Anything.

Daddy doesn't stay glued together. He starts drinking right after the funeral, and he doesn't ever stop. He doesn't cry or mean or weepy. He doesn't explain why he could ride out Mama's death but not Precious's. Maybe he doesn't know. He just sits at the kitchen table, night after night, and quietly empties one bottle after another. During the day, he waits for me. Pretty soon, I think, he won't bother

to wait.

Donna doesn't stick around to find out. She cries all the time for a few months. She wants to talk on and on about Precious, and I can't listen. I can't. Eventually she finds someone who will, a government counselor in Kellsville, who finds her a job waiting on customers in a fancy restaurant. Customers like her. Bit by bit Donna stops crying. She gets some friends, then a boyfriend. I don't see her much. And when I do, it's hard to look straight into each other's eyes.

And me. I don't know if I stayed glued together or not. I'm too mad to know.

"You're Dave's girl," Denny says, just like he hasn't taken me back and forth from Kellsville in his truck for years. He's one of those men terrified of female scenes. "What can I do for you, uh . . ."

"Carol. You can let me stay here and keep house for you."

He looks like I could be rabid. "Well, uh, Carol, I don't know about that, I thought you were keeping house for your father, he sure needs you since, uh—"

"He doesn't need anybody," I said. "And you do." I looked around me. Denny's wife left him, finally, last month. He had one girl too many. Since she moved, Denny hasn't washed a dish or a sheet or a tabletop. His girlfriends, who he meets at the Road Nest Bar, aren't the type given to housekeeping. The two cats stopped using their litter box. Denny leaves all the windows open to control the smell, which it doesn't, even though it's pouring outside and rain is blowing in sideways. It's what's left of his cat-piss-soaked couch. Everybody's got a limit how much reeking mess they can tolerate. Denny's limit is pretty high, but I'm still betting he's got one.

"I'm a good housekeeper," I say. "And I can cook. Daddy says he'd take it as a favor if you let me live here. He knows I need to get away from the memories in our house."

Denny nods slowly. It makes him feel better to think that he's helping Daddy. But he still has doubts.

"The thing is, Carol, you know how folks are. They talk. And you ain't a kid no more. I don't want nobody to think

"The only one that matters is Daddy, and he knows better. Besides, if you go on having lady-friend company, the neighbors will tell them I sleep in the spare room and that you treat me like a daughter for my daddy's sake."

Again Denny nods. He likes the idea of having lady-friend company and a clean house, too. "But I can't, uh, pay for nothing, Carol, things are tight right now. Maybe later when—"

"I don't want any money, Denny. All I want is for you to teach me how to use the Subnet. On your terminal, same as you taught Daddy. For two hours a day, at least in the beginning."

He doesn't like that. Too much time. But just then one of the cats squats and shits on the table, into a plate of rice. The congealed rice grains are hard as kitty-litter pellets.

"Okay," Denny says.

All winter I work like hell. I throw out Denny's couch and everything else I can't boil. I scrub and pound and make couch out of boards and blankets. I cook and launder and shop with Denny's dole credits. Twice a week I walk out to Daddy's to do the same for him. And half the night I practice what Denny teaches me, until I'm tired enough to sleep. A few days my eyes ache from the constant reading, and not only on the Subnet, either. I spend hours in the science sections of the Net. When one of Denny's girlfriends complains that I "talk snooty," I realize that my vocabulary has changed. Well, well . . . everything else has.

By the time crocuses push up through the snow, Denny can't teach me any more. Actually, I know much more now than Denny taught me, because I found other people on the Subnet who also taught me things. There's an entire class of Subnet riders—mostly young, mostly with little to lose personally—who like nothing better than showing off what they know. I learned how to let such people impress me.

However, that sort of petty rider only knows so much. So does Denny. And I have nothing to trade. So far I have not been able to get the Subnet to tell me the one thing I want to know the most. And I'm not going to find it out by staying on the Subnet. I write notes to Denny and Daddy, and I walk down the mountain to the highway.

The Red Goldfish Trucking Company is guarded by dogs.

There's a fence, too, of course, a single strand of token wire to mark the Y-energy-alarmed barrier surrounding the facility. I push against the invisible field with one hand, and it feels solid as brick. But any power-generated security system has to be turned on, and that means it can be turned off. Dogs are harder to turn off, unless you kill them, and it's hard to get anything like a bullet or a slab of poisoned meat through most Y-energy security fields without setting off the alarm. The Subnet rumor that the Sleepless have developed a missile to penetrate Y-barriers, plus a field that will stop that same missile and anything else, including air. But it's only a rumor. Sleepless do not sell weapons. They're too smart to arm their enemies.

I stand a few inches outside the fence and gaze in at the Red Goldfish Trucking Company. It's a windowless four-story building standing in the middle of rows of white trucks, each with a red goldfish painted on both sides. Before the goldfish those trucks bore flowing blue script that said *Pennsylvania Shipping*. Before that, they had the blue daisies of Federal Delivery Systems. Before that, the orange lettering of Stanley Express. It was a Stanley Express truck that delivered the pregnant dog to Daddy's new business.

No record exists on-line of that transaction. It's hard enough to track the company itself on the Subnet, let alone its customers. Or its owner.

I watch through the fence for two nights, very carefully, until I'm sure about the dogs. There are three dogs, all German shepherds, all unneutered males. They're probably genemod for strength and hearing. They're superbly trained, much better than poor Donna could have done. They sleep in shifts. They are not genemod for intelligence.

You can do certain things to the genetic makeup of dogs and they remain functioning dogs. Other things you can't. You can't really boost a dog's intelligence much. If you do, you end up with a pattern of neural connections too complex for the hindbrain to handle. It's like a cable jammed with too much information. The signal breaks down. The pups just sit in place and shiver and whimper. They can't be fixed, and eventually you have to kill them. Some scientists at Harvard published a paper about this on the Net. Some underground labs in Ohio and Florida already knew it. They advertised **IQ DOGS!** on the Subnet. Until they didn't anymore. Somebody's looking for them, too, although I don't think it's a private customer. I think it's the cops.

The cops are the main link between the Net and the Subnet. But they're not the only link.

Red Goldfish Trucking's dogs patrol the entire fence every six minutes. They're efficient, alert, and dedicated. But they're still dogs.

Just before one of them passes my place outside the fence, I roll over on my back. I'm wearing perfume: a genetically created as a wolf attractant for use in Consolidated Wilderness Areas. It was developed at the University of California at La Jolla, which holds the patent. It was also developed at underground labs in Idaho and Minnesota. You can order it at Subnet 784jKevinMart, access route 43ICE7946, through JemalTown, Cash Drop Described Elsewhere.

The guard dog smells me. His gait falters. His gaze shoots sideways to me, on my back on the ground, all fours in the posture of submission in wolf packs. And dog packs. But I'm outside the fence. After that brief falter, he resumes his normal pace and trots on.

Six minutes later, I'm still there.

At midnight the dogs change shifts; I don't know on what conditioned signal. The new dog goes through the reaction to me: faltering, then going on. I roll slightly, wiggling, my limbs in the air. At 3:00 a.m., I go home. Workers show up here every day at four.

I'm back the next night. And the next. During the day I work for a housecleaning company that sends out maids to houses. Very quickly I become popular with their customers. I'm skillful at using the special bots for each job, and especially good at cleaning up disasters left by other, malfunctioning bots.

On the twentieth night, the 4-p.M.-to-midnight dog stops on his side of the fence, reaches through the Y-energy with his paw, and cuffs me roughly on the butt. He's the alpha male, the biggest of the guard dogs, the one who carries his tail highest and his ears pricked forward the farthest. He tears a gash in my padded trousers and then trots away on his regular patrol.

I lie still, waiting for him to return. Six minutes later he does, cuffs me again, and moves on.

By the end of the month, half his body juts through the Y-fence, which from the inside he doesn't know is there, and he rolls me around on the ground. Sometimes he's rough, sometimes just playful. I have deep scratches on my neck and have to try to keep him away from my face, and when I fail, I wear heavy makeup at work. When the dog's on top of me, snapping and fake-growling, I try to never remember Precious.

It's not the dog's fault. His brain is hard-wired. All the dogs in a pack pick on one dog. That's the function of the omega dog, the last and least, to give all the other dogs something to pick on and exploit. The pack needs that outlet to work off tension they might otherwise use fighting each other. The omega dog is in their genes.

Sometimes, when Alpha takes my arm in his jaws and shakes it, I put my hand on his neck. I can feel the beeper, just under his skin, transmitting the electronic signal that lets him penetrate the fence if he happens to brush up against it without setting off alarms. And anything attached to him would also penetrate: you don't want the alarms going off just because your guard dog's tail brushed a Y-field and that tail happens to have a burr stuck on it.

On the thirty-third day, I roll through the fence, smelling like a female wolf, my arms wrapped around the Alpha guard dog. He cuffs me sharply on the shoulder and leaves me there. He's been trained never to let a stranger inside. But I'm a member of his pack, filling a necessary position. It makes all the difference.

The Subnet claims, over and over, that it keeps no records. But the Subnet itself is a record, endlessly downloaded. There's one, there'll be others. Nobody can remember every business deal without help. Especially if you need to know who you did better not try to deal with a second time.

Nothing inside Red Goldfish Trucking is locked. But nothing gives me what I want, either. The windowless building is mostly used for cargo and fixing trucks, with a tiny, filthy office walled off in one corner. There's a terminal, although I know better than to think I'll find anything there. It's free-standing, but the government has new microwave equipment that can lift data off even free-standing terminals, as long as the terminal is switched on. The Subnet says it also has that equipment for sale. I don't believe it. I don't believe anything on the Subnet unless I try it out for myself, like I did the dog attractant. However, I know the Red Goldfish records won't be electronic.

They're plastic, written by hand on stiff blue cards stored in a blue box in the back of the closet. And they're in code.

Beta dog comes into the office. He's off duty. I have to let him knock me around for a few minutes before he curls up in the corner and goes to sleep.

I take the whole box with me, ride Alpha back through the fence, and catch the next bus out. On the bus I fall into my deepest sleep of my life. It feels like a reward.

There are five blue plastic cards, headed 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. That could mean chronological order, or groupings of different kinds of trucking jobs, or almost anything else. Each card is densely covered in small neat handwriting, row after row of letters and numbers and symbols with no breaks between. Card 5 is covered only two-thirds of the way down.

Donna stares as I walk with my suitcase into the Kellsville restaurant where she works. It's not a cheap table-delivery-soy-synth place; it has real food and human servers, including Donna. She wears a black uniform with a blue apron. Her hair is piled on top of her head. She looks like Mama.

"Carol! What on God's green earth . . . Daddy said you went clean over into Ohio to work!"

"I did. I'm back. Can I stay with you a bit?"

" 'Course you can, honey! And I want you to meet my boyfriend Jim, he's a real sweetie and I just know you two'll-

"Is there a housecleaning firm in town? I've been working as a maid."

Donna laughs. "In Kellsville? You got to be kidding. But in the city, maybe ... there's a gravtrain goes back and forth every day now, they just started it. But honey, you look terrible. You all right?"

I look at her. It's like looking at Mama: just as dead to me, just as far away. Donna's put Precious clean out of her hair. She doesn't know anything about deep black places you can fall into and never get out. She just doesn't know.

"I'm fine," I say. "Tell me your address and give me your key. You have a terminal, Donna?"

"One came with the apartment," she says proudly. "Though I don't use it much except for vid. You're welcome to anything you find there, except Jim."

She laughs, and I try to smile, and then I go to her place and get to work cleaning it up.

The next three months I work as fiendishly as I did at Denny's. Every day I take the new gravtrain to the city and do my cleaning job. They're glad to have me; I'm experienced with every kind of maintenance bot they have. Every night I sit at the terminal in the ten-by-ten living room of Donna's apartment, trying not to hear Donna and Jim making love in the ten-by-ten bedroom.

I start with free code programs off the Net. I feed in all the data from the five blue plastic cards and run the programs. None of them makes any sense out of the data.

After a month I've saved up enough credits to download programs that cost money. None of them works either.

"What're you doing on that terminal all night every night, honey?" Donna asks. "You're getting circles under your eyes. Don't you want to come out dancing with us and have a little fun? Jim's got some pretty peccy friends!"

"No, thank you," I say. "You seen Daddy lately?"

Her face goes flat. "Tomorrow. You know I go every Tuesday. You want to come with me?"

I shake my head and go back to the terminal. Donna doesn't say anything more. After she leaves, I can still smell her perfume, flimsy and sweet, in the stale air.

The best code breakers aren't programs you can buy. They're netsites that take your data and run it through their own decryption algorithms. All are very expensive, although you can negotiate with them. They're on the Subnet, of course. From what I read, some of them use programs stolen from the government. The best ones might even be stolen from the military. Maybe.

The problem is guessing which ones might be best. Housemaids don't make a lot of money, not even when they're doing cleaning bot technicians.

Finally I contract with a Subnet site called Bent. They seem to do business in Pennsylvania, New York, and Ohio through a heavily shielded transaction, although it uses regular credit, not a cash drop. I give them the data off the blue plastic cards and they empty my bank account. Afterwards I close the account and open a new one with a different e-bank.

That night, for the first time ever, I dream about Precious. She's sitting in her high chair, dressed in pink overalls, laughing. Whatever she's laughing at is behind me, and when I try to turn around, I'm frozen in place. Frantically I twist my body but no muscles will move. Precious goes on laughing.

Donna and Jim bring home a chair. They've been saving to buy it. It's bright screaming green, and it gives off different scents, including sex pheromones. They spend ten minutes trying to decide where to put it.

"In this corner, sweetie," Donna says.

"In the bedroom would be better." Jim leers.

"Carol Ann, what do you think?"

I think it's the ugliest piece of furniture I've ever seen. "I don't care."

"About anything," Jim says under his breath. I pretend not to hear him. He's getting a little impatient with me living here so long. But he won't say anything, because it's what Donna wants.

Donna says, "Okay, the bedroom," and she and Jim look at each other in a way that says I should leave the apartment for an hour or so.

I leave for three, walking the streets more or less aimlessly. When Bent tells me who the bastards are who sold the

the sleepless dogs . . . Daddy's gun is one thing he hasn't sold for whiskey. I know because I buried it before I left, well behind the place the dog pens used to be. Ammunition doesn't cost that much. It can be ordered off the Subnet, no questions asked, no records kept. (Right.)

I would recognize the Arrowgene scientist anywhere. His appearance, his voice, his supercilious manner with people are ignorant. Scientists aren't cops. They don't go around armed. They don't walk wary. I'm not a good shot, but with a gun, I don't need to be.

It's not what I'd prefer, of course. I'd prefer to get him somewhere isolated, tie him up, smear him with blood from a freshly killed rabbit. Let loose a pack of dogs that have been starved for a week . . .

These imaginings fill up three hours. They've filled up whole nights, weeks, months. I walk until the sun starts to set, then I go back to Donna's apartment building. Outside sit two police aircars. A stretcher bot rolls out beside an orderly

"Jim! What—"

But his stretcher rolls on past. A cop moves in beside me. "Who are you, miss?"

"I live here! He's . . . *where's my sister?*"

Donna isn't inside. She's already gone to work. The cop tells me they've sent for her, she's on her way, she's safe.

"Jim . . ."

"The medic says he'll be all right. Just roughed up some. Now you tell me, miss. Is anything missing?"

I look around Donna's apartment. Drawers have been pulled out, furniture turned over, the bed flung apart. I pretend to study the mess, but I already know. Everything's still here except five blue plastic cards, and the next time I try to find them on the Subnet, it'll be gone.

Arrowgene must not've been a small underground lab after all. It must've been part of a bigger organization with terminal-trace programs. With enforcers. With the idea of protecting their truckers and scientists and anonymity.

"Miss?"

There was no way I could fight that sort of organization. Nobody could, not even the government, or the FBI would shut it down by now. Nobody with enough power and information . . . except maybe one other organization.

"Miss, I *asked* you if you notice anything missing."

"No," I say. "Everything here is just the way it always was."

Tony Indivino was already living in Sanctuary when he visited us last spring. We didn't know that then. We didn't know then.

Sanctuary is nearly completed by the time I arrive there. It's huge, half of a rural New York State county circled by a Y-field. Most of the Sleepless in the United States are moving inside, where they feel safe. They trade with the rest of the world, information and inventions and money deals I don't understand. Mostly they trade data, but you can also find tangible Sleepless products on the Net. The ones on

the Subnet are fakes.

I stand at the front gate of Sanctuary in a crowd of tourists who've gotten off bus after bus. They mutter and glare. I

"Walling themselves in, and us out."

"They better stay the fuck in there if they know what's good for them."

"A monument to genemod narcissism."

I look at the man who says that. He looks genemod himself, handsome and well dressed, but apparently not a Sleepless. And just as resentful as the rest of the haters who still spent their good money to travel here to a place full of people they're jealous of. Go figure.

On the front of the gate is a big screen with the Sleepless, Inc. logo on it: an open eye. Some kids throw rocks at it, but the screen doesn't waver. Protected by a Y-field. It says quietly, over and over, "To leave a message for Sanctuary, Incorporated, or for any 1 individual inside, please speak clearly into one of the five recorders below. Thank you. To leave a message for Sanctuary, Incorporated—" People are lined up to leave messages, mostly nasty. I can guess how this works. A smart system sorts through the messages, flagging them by key word, choosing the ones that actually get delivered. If any do. People with real business with Sanctuary don't use this channel.

Except that I have real business with Sanctuary.

When it's my turn, I speak quietly, so the jerks behind me can't hear.

"This is a message for Tony Indivino, from Carol Benson. You came to our house in Forager County, Pennsylvania March to warn us about the genemod dogs my Daddy bought on the Subnet. They were Sleepless embryos implanted in a mongrel bitch, bought from a company called Arrowgene. You were right about the dogs, and now I need to talk with you. Just for a minute. Please see me." And then, after I could get the words up my throat, "My baby sister was killed by those sleepless dogs."

I wait. Nothing happens. The man in line behind me finally says, "I think it's *my* turn now." When he repeats it, I look aside.

How long does the smart program take? And what if Tony Indivino isn't inside Sanctuary? He must leave something that came to us.

Five minutes later the large screen flashes a different icon: my name. It says, "Will Ms. Carol Benson please step in the elevator." And there it is, a sudden dimple in the gate like a small elevator, complete with wood-paneled walls. Before surprised people around me can react, I dart inside. The "door" closes. I touch it, and the walls, too; they're pure force with holos of wooden paneling. The whole thing doesn't move at all. It just "opens" on the other side, into a real room with white foamcast walls, clean-lined white sofas, and a wall screen which says, "Please wait, Ms. Benson, a few minutes longer."

I want to try the door at the far end of the room, to see if it's real. To see if it's locked. To see if I can really get into Sanctuary, where sleepers aren't allowed. But I don't dare. I'm a beggar here.

The door opens and a woman walks in, alone. Tall, with long black hair, dressed in jeans and sweater. She is beautiful, and more exotic, for real than on vid.

"Ms. Benson, I'm Jennifer Sharifi, Tony Indivino's associate. Tony cannot come himself. Please tell me what happened with the sleepless dogs."

She's nothing like Tony Indivino. He was friendly. She's cold, like some queen talking to a grubby peasant. But there's a weird nervousness to her, too. She keeps pushing back that long black hair, even when it's not in her face. I don't like her. But I need her.

I say, "My father ordered the embryos on the Subnet, from Arrowgene. The dogs were engineered to not—"

"I know all that," Jennifer Sharifi interrupts. "Tony told me about his visit to you. What happened subsequently?"

Does she remember everything "Tony" ever told her? Maybe she does. She's genemod for every ability possible. Suddenly I remember a story Mama read to Donna and me when we were small. "Sleeping Beauty." Fairy-blessed christening with beauty, intelligence, grace, talent, fortune . . .

"How did your sister die?" Jennifer Sharifi asks, and pushes back her long hair. "Did a Sleepless dog kill her?"

"Yes. No. Not deliberately. Precious—she was two—was bothering the dog while it ate, and it just cuffed her and she fell and she hit the ground at an angle where her neck . . ." I can't finish.

"Had the dogs been acting out of character before that?"

"Yes. My sister—my other sister—couldn't get them trained right. She said they were more like cats. They just didn't want to be trained."

She was silent so long I finally said, "Ms. Sharifi, I came here to—"

"Biological systems are very complex," she says. "And species are not identical in their neural inheritance, even if their structures seem completely analogous. A dog is not a human being, and sleeplessness doesn't affect both equally."

"I already know that!" I snap. It's what Tony Indivino said last March, in easier words. "Tell me now what killed my sister! If you know!"

"We know," she says, precisely. But her hand goes again to her long dark hair. "We keep track of all research work on sleeplessness, even that not yet published on the Net. A Danish institute is doing work on canine sleeplessness. The dog was dreaming."

"Dreaming?" I don't expect this.

"Yes. Let me try to explain it in terms you can understand." She thinks a minute, and I see she doesn't know how to explain it. Sounds. Or else she doesn't care.

"One facet of the human brain is its ability to imagine different realities. Today I don't have a cake. I picture the cake I want, and tomorrow I construct it. Or a house, or a concerto, or a city. That's one way the brain uses its ability to imagine alternate realities. Another way is to think up fantasies that never will or could be, like stories about magic. Another

through dreaming, asleep at night. Are you following me?"

I'm not stupid. But all I say is, " Yes."

"We Sleepless don't dream, obviously. But we do all the other methods of imagining alternate reality. Better, in fact, than you. The basic ability gets ample exercise.

"Now consider canine species. They evolved from wolves, but they're not wolves. They've been domesticated by humans for twenty thousand years. During that time—did you hear something?"

"No," I say. Her eyes dart toward the door, then the wallscreen. She pushes her hair back.

She's waiting for something, and jumpy as a cat. But she goes on. "During the time the dog was domesticated, it developed the ability to do what humans do, and visualize an altered reality. To some undefined extent, anyway. A dog doesn't just remember its master. And it does respond to Pavlovian conditioning, either. There's evidence from advanced neurological imagining that parts of a dog's brain activate when the animal interacts with humans. When, for instance, a human pets a dog, the dog actually pictures itself in an alternate reality with the human. Maybe at home in front of a fire. Maybe rolling around on the ground playing. There's no way to deduce specifics, but chemical, electromagnetic, and cerebral imaging evidence is all quite strong."

I nod, listening hard, making sure I understand it all. "And there's one more piece of research that's relevant here. These same brain functions go on during REM sleep, when dogs dream. That, too, is an imagining of alternate reality, as I already said."

She looks at me like she thinks I don't remember. I nod, hating her, to show I do. Tony Indivino wasn't like this.

"Here is the crucial piece. In sleepless canines, there's no REM sleep. When that's removed, so is dreaming. And when dogs don't dream, the alternate-reality imagining slowly disappears from their brain scans. The function is still there when they're born, but over the next several months it fades. Without reinforcement from dreaming, imagination—as humans know the term—disappears. Without imagination, the bond with man weakens and the older limbic behavior takes over. Dreaming made all the difference. Its absence is what happened to your sister."

I struggle to understand. "You mean ... because the dog couldn't imagine people and dogs together in ways that weren't happening at just that minute . . . it wouldn't take its training and it didn't care about Precious? She died because Leisha's pup couldn't *dream*—" "What?" Jennifer says sharply. "Who couldn't dream?" I remember that she and Leisha Camden, who Donna named the pup after, are enemies. They have different dreams for the Sleepless. Jennifer wants them all in Sanctuary; Leisha wants them to live outside in the real world with us, the inferior animals.

"The dog," I stumble on, "my sister named the pups, my other sister, not me—"

"That's all I have to tell you, Ms. Benson," Jennifer Sharifi says. She stands crisply. "I hope the information explains what happened. Sanctuary is sorry for your loss. If you'll step back into the security elevator—"

"No, wait! You didn't tell me what I have to know!"

"I've told you all I can. Good-bye."

"But I need to know the name and location of the company that sold Daddy the embryos! They were called Arrowgene then, but now I can't track them on the Subnet, they've changed their name or shut down . . . but I have their truckers' business records! Only they're in code and I don't know anybody else who could figure out—"

"I can't give you that information. Good-bye, Ms. Benson."

I spring toward her. It's a mistake. I hit an invisible barrier that's apparently been there the whole time, unseen. It doesn't hurt, but I can't move any farther toward Jennifer Sharifi.

She turns. "If you don't get into the elevator, Ms. Benson, the field will carefully push you into it. And don't bother me with any more messages for Tony. He's not here, and if he were, he would tell you that Sanctuary is about survival. Not revenge."

She leaves. The Y-field pushes me into the security box and then opens on the other side, and I'm back in the Allegheny hills.

Later that day, on a bus going home, I hear on vid that Sleepless activist Tony Indivino has been arrested. The FBI linked him to kidnapping four years earlier. He abducted a four-year-old boy named Timmy DeMarzo, a Sleepless child whose normal parents had beaten and disturbed them in the middle of the night nearly every night. Tony Indivino had hidden the kid with people who had taken much better care of him. But now he's been caught and arraigned, and is being held without bail in the Conewango County jail.

There must be other ways beside the Subnet to find an underground genemod lab. But I don't know what they are. I've done everything I can think of to do. But how can I give up the search for Precious's killer? If I give up the search . . .

Outside the bus windows, the road climbs higher into the mountains. Already it's June. The woods are in full leaf, although they're not yet deep green but instead that tender yellow-green you see only a week or ten days every year. The sunny roadside bursts with daisies and buttercups and Queen Anne's lace. Creeks rush; streams burble.

If I lose my anger, there won't be anything of me left.

For just a second I look into a black place so deep and cold that my breath freezes. Then it's gone and the bus keeps climbing the mountain road.

It lets me off in Kellsville and I walk the rest of the way up the mountain, which takes until sunset. Daddy's yard is just the same. Straggly grass, deep ruts, sagging porch. But it's not Daddy sitting on the porch. It's Donna.

"I thought you'd come here," she says, not standing up. "Or did you go by my place first?"

"No." In the shadows I can't see her face.

"Did you go by the hospital to see how Jim's doing?"

"No."

" 'No.' 'Course not. He don't concern you, does he?'"

I ignore this. "Where's Daddy?"

"Asleep. No—passed out. Let's be honest for once, okay, Carol Ann?"

But it was always Donna who wasn't honest. Who insisted on being sunny in a world where the sun only really shines for the rich. I don't say this.

She continues, "You're the reason Jim got hurt, aren't you? And the reason my place got trashed. You're doing something you shouldn't be doing, and somebody important don't like it."

"It's none of your business, Donna."

" 'None of my business.' " She stands up then, in the porch shadows. " 'None of my business!' Who the fuck do you think you are to tell me what's my business and what isn't? How much more family do you think I got to lose?"

This isn't Donna. This is somebody else. I climb the porch steps and turn her face toward the sunset. She hasn't started crying, but in the red light she starts to shake all over with a fury I never in a million years thought she was capable of.

"You stupid fuck—what do you think you're *doing*? You got Jim hurt and you're going to get yourself hurt next. Daddy, or me! Whatever you're doing, it isn't going to bring Precious back, and it isn't going to get even because there's no 'even.' Don't you even know that? You can't beat those people; all you can do is try and stay away from them, and when you do brush up against them you get out quick and forget anything you learned or they'll wreck whatever you got left of your life!"

"Donna, you don't know—"

"No, it's you who don't know! You don't know *nothing* about how the world works! You're supposed to be the smart one, and I'm supposed to be dumb as a bucket of hair, poor old dumb Donna, but I know you can't fight them and win. You can only lose what you already did and I'm not going to do that—I'm not going to lose everything else I got left. And you're not going to do for me neither, Carol Ann. Promise me right here and now, on Precious's grave, that you'll leave this alone."

"I can't."

"Promise me."

"I said I can't!"

We stare at each other in the dying light, and I see that we're never going to agree, never going to understand each other. We're made too different. She lives in a world where when you get slammed hard, you pick yourself up and go on. I don't live in that world. I don't want to. That's what makes all the difference.

But it's her that crumbles first. "All right, Carol," she says wearily, not meaning it. "All right."

"I'm sorry," I say, not meaning it either.

We don't say anything more. The sun goes down, and somewhere down the mountain, a dog barks.

I move back to the city, and go back to work at my old house-cleaning company. Whenever I can I sign up for double shifts, in the day and offices at night. It makes me tired enough to sleep. Donna visits me once. I cook her dinner, we go to the movies, and she takes the gravetrain back the next day. The whole time, she chats and laughs and hugs me. The guy in the apartment next door watches her like she's a vid star.

I'm hanging on. Trying not to think. Not to feel. Waiting, although I don't know for what. The days are frozen and the nights dreamless.

It's not that way for the rest of the country. Every day something else happens. A Sleepless teenager dies in a car crash in Seattle, and they take apart his body and brain. They find that every bit of tissue is perfect. Not just in good shape—he's only seventeen—but Sleepless tissue regenerates. The Sleepless won't age. An unexpected side effect, the scientists say.

A county in New York says Sleepless can't serve on juries because they aren't "peers" of everybody else.

A scientist in Illinois publishes a study on sparrows made to be sleepless. Their metabolism is so high they can't eat enough to keep themselves alive. They die, eating and eating, of starvation.

Pollux, Pennsylvania, votes a law that Sleepless can be refused apartment rentals. They're awake too much, which run up landlords' utility bills.

Some institute in Boston proves that sleepless mice are unable to contract or carry hantoviruses.

A vid preacher declares Jennifer Sharifi the Antichrist, sent to Earth to represent ultimate evil just before the Armageddon.

The *New York Times* prints an editorial that says, essentially, that everybody should take a deep breath and calm about sleeplessness.

And in July, the inmates of the Conewango County Jail kill Tony Indivino in the recreation yard. They beat him to with a lead pipe.

I learn this on the eleven o'clock news, drinking a beer and cleaning my own apartment. The terminal is a cheap star wars wallscreen, rimmed in black plastic. The news has no pictures of the death.

". . . promised a full investigation of the incident, which occurred at twelve-twenty this afternoon Eastern Standard Time. The inspector general of the New York State Correctional System—"

If they knew the exact time the "incident" was occurring, why didn't somebody stop it?

I stand there, staring at the screen, a glass of beer in one hand and a cleaning rag in the other. The red message light on the side of the terminal blinks. These cheap systems can't split the screen. I choose the message, and the Sanctuary logo appears on the black rim.

"Message for Carol A. Benson," says a pleasant computer voice, "from Jennifer Sharifi of Sanctuary, Incorporated, New York State. This message is shielded to Class One-A. It will not record on any system and will repeat only once. The message is: Arrowgene operating as Mountview Bionetics, Sarahela, Pennsylvania. Chief scientist is Dr. Tyler Robert 419 Harpercrest Lane. End message."

The screen blanks.

If Tony Indivino were here, he would tell you that Sanctuary is about survival. Not revenge.
Not anymore.

I fiddle with the terminal for half an hour, but the computer voice was accurate. The message hasn't been recorded. There's no trace anywhere, in my system or in the retrievables off the parent system. I'm the only one who will ever hear it.

Daddy's gun is where I left it, and in the same condition. So is he.

"Hey, Daddy."

It takes him a minute to focus. "Carol Ann."

"It's me."

"Welcome home." Suddenly he smiles, and I see a flash of what he was, the old cheerful sweetness, before it sinks under the smell of whiskey. "You here? Long?"

"No," I say. "Just overnight."

"Well, 'night. Sleep tight." It's seven o'clock in the evening.

"Sure, Daddy. You, too."

"Gonna sit up. Little longer."

"You do that."

The next morning, I'm gone by five. The gun comes apart, and it's in my duffel bag. I wear jeans and good shoes. At seven I'm in Kellsville. The bus south leaves at eight. I drink a cup of coffee and watch the headlines circle the news kiosks.

NO SUSPECTS IDENTIFIED IN INDIVINO MURDER.

"NO ONE IS TALKING," SAYS CONEWANGO WARDEN (STORY 1—[click here](#))

FBI RECEIVES ANON CALL TO BOMB SANCTUARY (STORY 2)

INDIVINO DEATH CALLED NATIONAL DISGRACE (STORY 3)

RAIN PUMMELS SOUTHEAST (STORY 4) FRANCE CALLS FOR MAJOR EUROCREDIT REFORM (STORY 5)

SCIENTISTS CREATE GENEMOD ALGAE. POTENTIAL FOR FEEDING THE WORLD

IS ENORMOUS, SAYS NOBELIST (STORY 6)

I put in a credit chip and press button six. The flimsy prints out, but there's not time to read it before my bus leaves. I shove the flimsy in my pocket and sleep all the way to Sarahela, Pennsylvania.

Four-nineteen Harpercrest Lane is in a shielded community. From beyond the gate I can see streets running down to a river. The houses are tall, narrow, and stuck together in fours and fives. There are trees, small playgrounds, beds of perfect genemod flowers. The ones which I don't know the name of, sparkles blue.

It's the kind of community that cooperates, that relies on word of mouth. A single day of loitering outside the gate earns me the name of the most commonly used residential cleaning company: Silver's Polish. The next day I'm hired. They're glad to have an experienced cleaning tech.

The Dr. Tyler Wellses have a tech come every Thursday. On my second week I trade shifts with another worker for one, telling him I need Wednesday off to see a doctor. By eight o'clock I'm in the house. I set the vacuuming to snuffling around the kitchen floor and spray the sink with organic-molecule-eating foam. Four littered places on the breakfast table. I go through the rest of the house.

Two kids' rooms, toys and small clothing. They've already left for school.

A woman singing in the master-bedroom shower. Nobody else is home. I go back down the stairs. Halfway down the landing with a sculpture of a Greek wrestler below a cool blue-tinted window, I see him come out of a backyard carrying a trowel and wearing gloves. Short, skinny, slightly balding. Dr. Tyler Robert Wells, scientist, gardens by hand without bots.

I slip the gun from my cleaning kit, push the parts together, and raise it to the window. Once he's in the crosshair, I push the chip to take over, keeping centered on his head. It's in his head, the knowledge that genemods animals to kill other people and children. I sit the gun on the wide polished windowsill, where it follows Wells's every move on its all-directional sensor. I programmed it to my voice, within a five-foot radius. All I have to do is say "Fire."

"Don't," a voice says.

I look up, expecting to see the woman from the shower standing above me. But she's still singing in a distant room. A female voice is below, a much older woman dressed like a bodyguard. Her gun is the handheld kind. "Carol, don't shoot. Listen first."

A bodyguard shouldn't know my name. And I shouldn't take time to listen. She's too late to stop my verbal command. I raise my gun, and that's all that matters. It never mattered whether or not I got out.

"Don't say your gun codeword because we're going to get him anyway. The government is. Yes, we know who you are. Ever since you tried to use Bent to decode Red Goldfish Trucking. We went back and put it together then. We'll get Wells. I promise you. But if you kill him now, there's a lot of information we won't get. Don't say the codeword. Just come down the stairs and I'll deprogram the gun."

"No."

"Carol, if you kill him we'll prosecute you. We'll have to. But if you leave, I'll get immunity for you. And your father's safe about the sleepless dog embryos. Come down."

"No."

"I know about your little sister. But our chances of getting the right evidence against Wells are stronger if we have him. Time with him. It will make all the difference to our case."

"Fire," I say to the gun, and close my eyes.

Nothing happens.

My eyes fly open. The gun still sits on the windowsill, swiveling to follow the back of Wells's head. The FBI agent has climbed the stairs between us. She puts a hand on my arm. I feel the biometal joints augmenting her grip. Her eyes are steady. "You gave you the chance to get out. Now please come quietly."

"What... how..."

"We have counterfields you couldn't possibly know about. Don't you realize you're way over your head? Weapons are getting more complex every day. And you're not even a pro."

I let her lead me quietly out of the house, into an aircar marked BLAISEDELL BODYGUARDS, INCORPORATED. Nobody pays any attention to us. As we lift above Harpercrest Lane, the last two things I notice are Wells, bent happily over his garden, and a dog, a collie, lying on the bright green genemod grass on somebody's front lawn, asleep.

The FBI agent turns out not to be an FBI agent after all. She works for something called the United States C Standards Enforcement Agency, something new, something created because of the eruption of genemod, legal and The GSEA is going to prosecute me. They have to, my new lawyer says. But they'll do it slowly, to give themselves time to nail Wells and Mountview Bionetics and Bent and all the other companies woven together with underground lab government will get Wells eventually, my lawyer says. The GSEA agent was right about that.

But she was wrong about something else. Every day I sit in my cell, on the edge of my cot, and think about how she was.

Nothing makes all the difference. To anything. The systems are too complex. You genemod dogs for sleeplessness you destroy their imagination. You genemod people for sleeplessness and you get super-people, who can imagine ever and invent anything. But Tony Indivino was killed by the lowest scum there is, and Jennifer Sharifi is taking Sanctuary purposes of safety to purposes of revenge. Donna chooses to deny anything that makes her unhappy, but the deep frozen place is in her just as much as in me. Daddy survives his wife's death but breaks down at his daughter's. Sleepless mice have great immune systems; sleepless sparrows starve to death; Sleepless humans regenerate tissue. Genemod algae will end hunger. Dogs genemod for IQ go catatonic, and guard dogs with the best training in the world will revert to pack pecking order. omega animal smells right.

No one factor can make all the difference. There are too many different factors, now. Maybe there always were.

So I'll let my lawyer, who is a Sleepless named Irving Lewis, defend me. He wants the case for what he calls "the eventual ch set significant Constitutional precedents." Except for court appearances, he does most of his work inside Sanctuary.

Maybe he can get me off, maybe he can't. Either way, I don't know what will happen next. Not to me, not to anything. I can't make things come out my way: get a job, make up with Donna, go to college. Someday I'd like to work for the GSEA. That wouldn't make Precious, or for anything else. But maybe it might make a small, slight, necessary difference.