

Ring up baby

Order a little sister, then order her about.

Ellen Klages

Nanny says that I am spoiled. It comes from being an only child, and not having to share holidays or cakes and always getting to sit by the window. If I had a little brother or sister, I would learn responsibility. More work for her, she sighs, but she is only thinking of my character. Thinking about me is Nanny's job.

Of course, Mother is far too busy to have a baby right now, what with the Henderson case and all. (When I have supper with her, on Wednesdays, she talks about nothing but the Henderson case.) So Nanny has arranged for a nice lady to plant Mother's egg and do all the messy parts, then give the baby to us when it's done.

"What would you like," Nanny asks me over cocoa. "A brother or a sister?"

I have to think for a moment, but only a little, because a brother would be a pest and get into my best things, like Courtney Taylor's brother Robby, who programmed her mobile phone to ring with a nasty farting sound. A sister is someone I can be the boss of.

"A sister, please," I say in my sweet voice. Nanny loves my sweet voice.

Nanny touches a box on the wall screen, and it glows bright pink.

"Birthday?" she asks, her finger not quite touching the screen, but ready.

My birthday is in June. "October," I say after a minute, because I've had to count in my head, so her party won't get in the way of Christmas, either.

"Excellent," says Nanny. "We can place our order today." She taps her finger on the screen. That box glows red.

"What else can we pick?" There are a lot of boxes. I finish my cocoa and stand right next to Nanny, who smells like Vermont. A nice cool green smell.

She begins to read to me, scrolling slowly down.

"Hair colour?"

"Brown." Mine is honey blond.

"Eyes?"

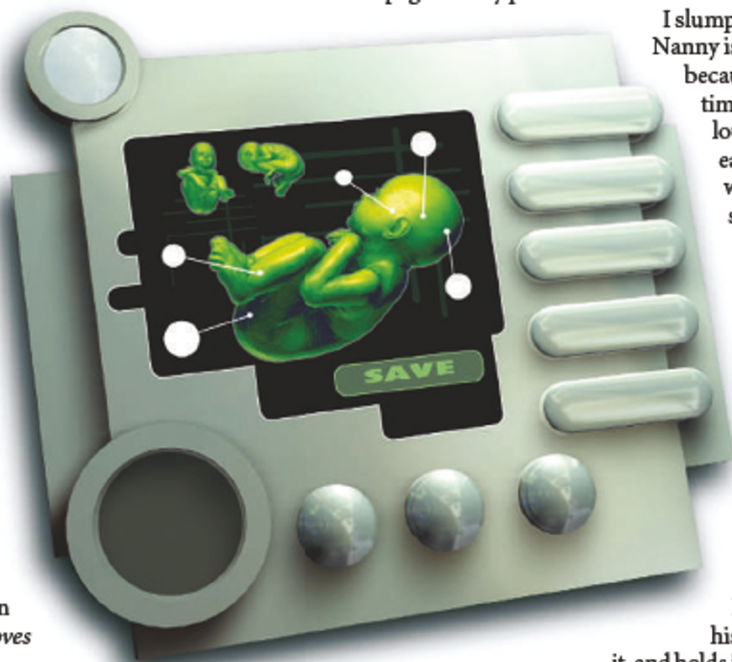
Mine are blue, so brown again. "Intelligence?"

I have to think about that. I don't want a sister who's *stupid*, but if she's smarter than me, she will be difficult to boss.

"Above average," Nanny decides. "Good at maths?"

Hmm. I'm in second grade, and we're doing the times tables. That could be useful. But it probably isn't something she'll be able to do right away.

So I shrug, which is a mistake, because Nanny is very strict about manners and posture and I have to listen to a lecture before she will tap the bottom of the screen and scroll to the next page of baby parts.



This page is less interesting because the words are very long and I don't know what they mean. Bioimmunity. Cholesterol. Neuro-muscular. I stare at the screen with my eyes very wide so that I don't yawn out loud.

On the side of the screen is a list, like the menu on the Emirate of Toys site, which I used by myself last year for my Christmas wants. The baby list is not very long. Babies only come in about six colours — we're getting one that matches Mother and me. Humans are a lot less interesting than Legos or iBots.

Nanny reads me all the diseases you can ask your baby not to have. Most of them are options, she says, which means we have to pay more. But I think we should pick them all, because a sick sister is not a good

thing. Angela Xhobi's sister has asthma, because she was made the old-fashioned way, without a menu, and she gets all the attention. I wouldn't like that at all.

Nanny takes a breath for another lecture, but I am saved when the iVid sings the Phone Call Song. Nanny sighs again and when she says, "Connect," I see that it's her mother, who calls every afternoon. Mrs Nanny is quite deaf, even with her implants, so Nanny taps SAVE on the baby screen and goes downstairs where she can shout without me hearing all the words. "Little pitchers," she says to her mother as she greys the upstairs iVid. I don't know what that means.

I slump back into my chair, because Nanny isn't here to tell me not to, and because she will be gone a long time. Her mother always has a lot to say. I stare at all the diseases, and then I see a better word at the bottom of the screen. PETS.

We don't harbour animals, because Nanny is allergic. (She was made the old-fashioned way, too.) But I'd like to see what we could have. I touch the screen to scroll down for more pets, and a Bubble Man appears, to tell me about a special offer. His picture seems to come out of the wall and stand right in front of me.

"Jellyfish DNA on sale," the Bubble Man says. He takes off his top hat, pulls a rabbit out of it, and holds it out towards me. The rabbit's fur glows a soft, bright green.

"Wow," I say.

"Bioluminescence, 50% off. Today only. Touch Box 306a to order!" He steps back into the screen and disappears with a little picture of smoke.

It only takes me a minute to find Box 306a and tap it to red. Then I SAVE and scroll back up to the disease boxes. It is good to leave things just the way you found them.

I sit very straight in my chair, humming, because I know a secret. Once I have my baby sister, I will never need my night-light again.

Nanny will be so proud. ■
Ellen Klages won a Nebula Award in 2005 for her story *Basement Magic*. Her first novel, *The Green Glass Sea*, will be published by Viking in October.

JACEY