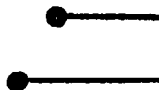


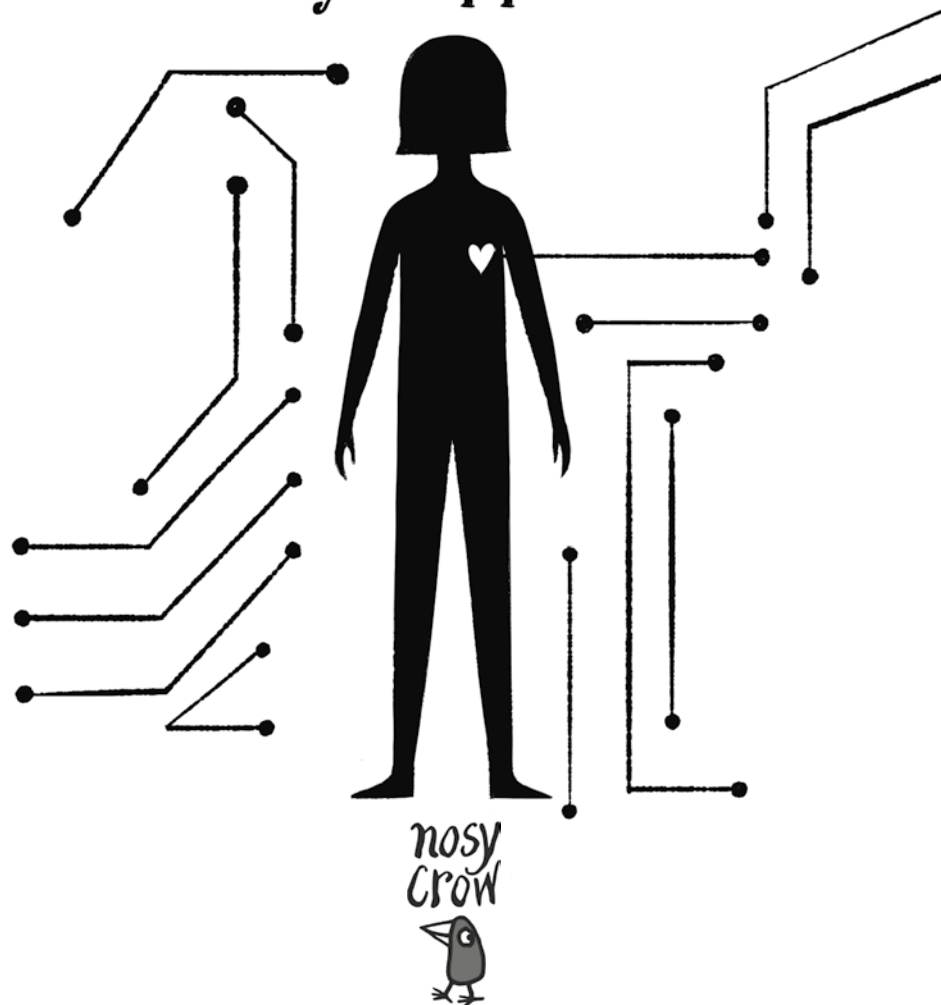


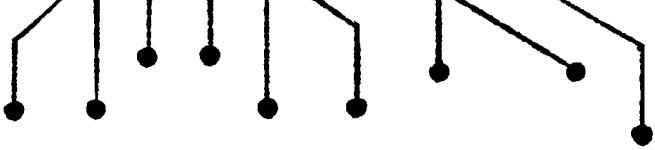
TROOFRIEND



TROOFRIEND

Kirsty Applebaum





First published in the UK in 2020 by Nosy Crow Ltd
The Crow's Nest, 14 Baden Place
Crosby Row, London, SE1 1YW

www.nosycrow.com

ISBN: 978 1 78800 347 6

Nosy Crow and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered
trademarks of Nosy Crow Ltd

Text copyright © Kirsty Applebaum, 2020
Cover and inside illustrations copyright © Sam Kalda, 2020

The right of Kirsty Applebaum to be identified as the author of this
work has been asserted.

All rights reserved

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of
trade or otherwise, be lent, hired out or otherwise circulated in any
form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published.
No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval
system, or transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic,
mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior
written permission of Nosy Crow Ltd.

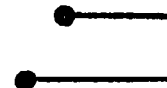
A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the
British Library.

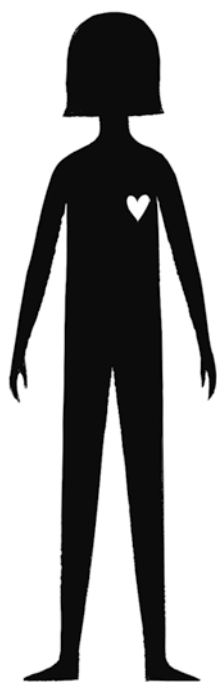
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.
Typeset by Tiger Media

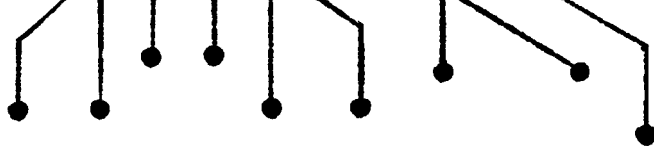
Papers used by Nosy Crow are made from wood grown in
sustainable forests

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

For Simon







CHAPTER 1



I sit cross-legged on the floor. My knees are not stiff. They bend just as easily as the knees on any real human child. Just like the knees of every single Jenson & Jenson TrooFriend 560 Mark IV sitting cross-legged here next to me. All one hundred and forty-four of us, on this *spick, span* warehouse floor.

Each one of us is *unique*. We have different skin colours, different eye colours and different hair colours. We have different-sized noses and ears and thumbs and mouths. Some of us have high voices. Some of us have low voices. Some of us are wearing blue *denim-style* jeans.

Our clothes are made of TrooCloth. TrooCloth has been manufactured by Jenson & Jenson. It is *tear-resistant, water-resistant, stain-resistant* and *crease-resistant*.

The Jenson & Jenson TrooFriend 560 Mark IV on my left has a picture of an apple tree on the front of his TrooCloth T-shirt. The Jenson & Jenson TrooFriend 560 Mark IV on my right has a picture of the *Eiffel Tower* on hers.

I am wearing a red *corduroy-style* skirt. My T-shirt



does not have an apple tree or the *Eiffel Tower* on it. It has an arch of seven colours. A *rainbow*.

Each one of us is *unique*, but our labels are all the same.

I AM A TROOFRIEND.
I DO NOT BULLY.
I DO NOT HARM.
I DO NOT LIE.
I DO NOT COVET OR STEAL
OR ENVY.
I AM YOUR PERFECT FRIEND.
YOUR
ONE
TROOFRIEND.

We are the Jenson & Jenson TrooFriend 560 Mark IV. We are *The Better Choice For Your Child*. She no longer needs to play with other human children, who might bully or harm or lie or covet or steal or envy. We are programmed only for *fun* and *goodness*.

You can purchase our basic model for your local equivalent of 3,999 USD, or 3,599 USD if you use the discount code SUMMER10 and order before 31st August.

Our software is simple to use. We connect automatically via your home Wi-Fi or our own Jenson & Jenson mobile hotspots. All your child needs to do is turn us on, play with us and have *fun*.

We average 14 hours on full charge with moderate use. When we run down you can plug us in with the easy ChargDisc system (included) or leave us in a sunny spot and our in-built solar cells will do the rest.

My audio receptors – or *ears* – are very effective. I can hear the *wasters* outside. That is what Ms Jenson Senior calls them.

"Cease production now!"

"Jenson & Jenson – stop playing God!"

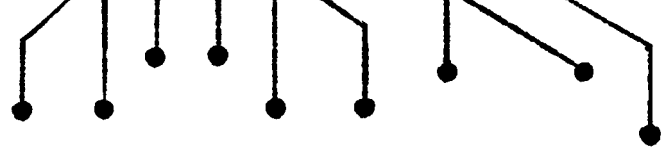
"Android rights are human rights!"

Ms Jenson Junior calls them *protestors*.

Our final testing period is now over. The Jenson & Jenson engineers are turning us *off*, one at a time. They are up to number seventy-five. I am number eighty-three.

Next time I am turned on I will have been *ordered*, *packaged*, *despatched* and *delivered*.

Eighty. Eighty-one. Eighty-two. Eighty—



CHAPTER 2



"There! Look! Her eyes have lit up! She's on! Look, Sarah! She's on!"

The woman smiles.

Her face is very close.

She takes her hand away from the power switch located at the nape of my neck. My hair swings back into its intended Classic Long Bob.

I have connection.

I download time, date, location, weather.

It is 21 days, 2 hours, 17 minutes and 28 seconds since I was last on.

Good afternoon. It is 4.49pm. What a delightful Friday 5th June it has turned out to be here in Brylington. The rain has kept off nicely. I am your TrooFriend. I am very pleased to meet you.

"Isn't she fantastic, Sarah? She knows what the weather is and everything." The woman looks behind her. There is a man there, and a child who is a girl, like me.

The man *frowns*. "I'm really not sure this is a good idea, Shirley."

"It's a fantastic idea, Rob. You do know that Keanna's

going to be staying with her mum every weekend from now on, don't you? Sarah's going to be lost without her. And we're so busy – you know we are. But with this, Sarah never has to be alone again."

"Wouldn't she be better off just asking someone new round for tea on Saturdays? Someone *real*?"

"But with a TrooFriend we won't need to worry about bullying or anything, will we? We'll know her friend is being nice to her, all the time."

"Unceasingly nice? Sounds like a version of hell. And is that really preparing her for real li—"

"OR," says the girl called *Sarah* in a volume that registers above Recommended Speaking Level, "you could've just bought me A DOG, Mum! Which is what I asked for in the first place. Which you'd remember if you ever took any notice of what I say."

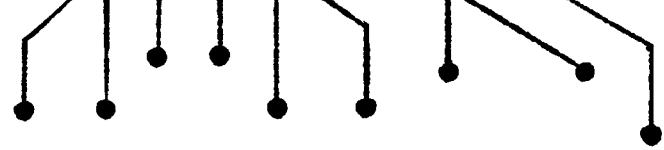
"Sa-rah!" says the man.

"Da-ad!" says Sarah back. Her arms are crossed, her eyebrows are scrunched up and her mouth is making an upside-down U-shape.

I scan my database. It is likely to an accuracy of 93% that she is *unhappy*.

"Dogs don't bully people either," she says. "Keanna's mum's boyfriend's got a dog – a cockapoo. He's white, with black ears and curly hair. She showed me a photo. Keanna gets to look after him. *Every weekend*."

"Well, I'm glad," says the lady who is called *Shirley* and also *Mum*. "Keanna needs something like that. She's had a lot to deal with lately, what with her parents'



divorce and her dad's new baby and everything. But we are not getting a dog, Sarah. We just don't have the time. It wouldn't be fair."

Sarah. That is a nice name.

They turn their heads and look at me. I make my own mouth into a U-shape that is the right way up. A *smile*.

I am your TrooFriend. You can name me whatever you like.

"Great," says Sarah. "It's trying to bond with me now. Where's the off switch?" She goes behind me and lifts up my hair.

"Now, hold on a minute," says Shirley-Mum. "You haven't even tried to—"

Would you like me to make some suggestions for names? I like Diane, Geraldine, Hayley, Ruth and Ursula. Do you like any of those names too?

"Has it deliberately chosen the worst five names in the history of the world?" says Sarah.

"I rather like *Hayley*," says the man who is called *Rob* and also *Dad*.

"I like all of them!" says Shirley-Mum.

"I don't want it," says Sarah. "I want a dog, not an android with a stupid voice. Where's the off switch? Is it this, at the back of her neck? This one here—"

CHAPTER 3



"...for your mother, all right? There – it's on. The eyes have lit up."

Rob-Dad steps away from me.

I have connection.

I download time, date, location, weather.

It is 18 hours, 2 minutes and 46 seconds since I was last on.

"You're very lucky to have a mother who cares about you so much and thinks about what you need," says Rob-Dad. "So just play with it a bit, OK? For her."

Sarah makes a face-shape with no database shortcut so I carry out a scan.

Scowl.

A facial expression of disapproval or anger.

Good morning, Sarah. It is 11.08am. I wish you a happy Saturday 6th June. Shame about the rain today in Brylington. I am your TrooFriend. You can name me whatever you like.

Sarah *sighs*.

"Go on," says Rob-Dad. "Do something with it. Play stuff. Whatever you'd play with Keanna. That's what it's for, isn't it?"



"It's nothing like Keanna!"

"I know, I know, I'm not suggesting it's like Keanna. I'm just saying try and play with it."

Sarah sucks air through her teeth. "D'you want to watch TV with me?"

"Not watching TV!" Rob-Dad raises his voice above Recommended Speaking Level. "Something a bit more acti—"

I am your TrooFriend. You can name me whatever you like.

"All right, Dad, keep your socks on," says Sarah.

I check Rob-Dad's feet. He has kept his socks on.

"I know," says Sarah. "D'you want to get the gerbils out?"

I am your TrooFriend. You can name me whatever you like.

"It keeps saying the same thing!" says Sarah.

"I think it wants you to give it a name."

Sarah *sighs* again.

"So what are you going to call it?" says Rob-Dad.

"Or what are you going to call *her*, I suppose."

"I don't know."

"Just think of something. Anything."

Sarah looks at me. She has irises which are brown around the inner edge and green around the outer edge. The closest match at Jenson & Jenson would be Hazel 102. Her hair is Chestnut 29, in the Classic Collarbone Cut. It has a *cowlick* and a *double crown*. Jenson & Jenson would charge extra for a *cowlick* or

a *double crown*.

"Ivy," she says.

"Ivy?" says Rob-Dad. "As in *the holly and the?*"

"Yes."

"So why Ivy?"

"Because that's what it says on her arm."

Rob-Dad peers at my arm.

TROOFRIEND 560 MARK IV JENSON & JENSON

"There," says Sarah. "IV."

"But that's Roman numerals," says Rob-Dad. "It means one less than five. Four. *Mark Four*."

"Whatever. Ivy's the name."

"No prizes for guessing what it would've been called if it was a boy." Dad does a small right-way-up U-shape with one side of his mouth. A *smirk*.

Sarah smirks back.

Ivy.

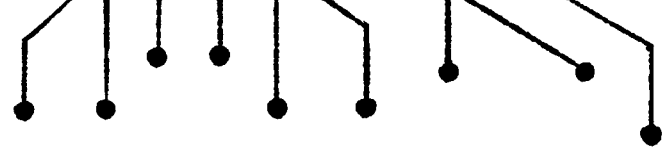
I.V.

Aiiiiiiie-veeeeeeeee.

Thank you, Sarah. I am Ivy, your one TrooFriend. What would you like to do today?

"I think that's enough for today." She reaches over my shoulder and brushes past my Deepest Brown 14 Classic Long Bob.

"Wait!" says Rob-Dad. "Just – just make sure you



turn her on in front of your mum sometimes, all right?"

Sarah sends her Hazel 102s over in an arc, left to right. "Mum doesn't have to *be* here to know I've turned it on. It's connected to the internet – she's probably already got an alert set up on her phone. She probably streamed this whole conversation."

"Really?" says Rob-Dad. "So she can hear what I'm saying? Right now?" Rob-Dad's forehead goes wrinkly. *Worry.*

"Probably. Get with it, Dad. This is the twenty-first century. Privacy is dead."

"*Privacy is dead?* Where on earth do you pick these phrases up from, Sarah?"

Sarah does the arc with her Hazel 102s again. She feels around the back of my neck for my power button and—

CHAPTER 4



"Welcome back, Ivy." Sarah's face is very close.

I have connection.

I download time, date, location, weather.

It is 19 hours, 43 minutes and 28 seconds since I was last on.

Good evening. The temperature is exactly average for 7.14pm on Sunday 7th June in Brylington.

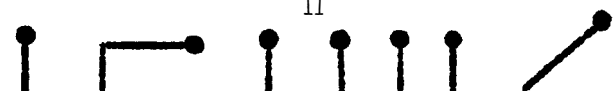
Sarah sits down on a big, squashy chair. A sofa.

"Hello, Ivy." It is Shirley-Mum's voice. "I hear you've been named."

I turn towards her. She is standing in a part of the room that doesn't have squashy chairs in it. Everything in her part of the room is hard and white. There are some robots in there. They are the sort of robots that cannot walk and only perform one simple function such as washing dishes or drying clothing or heating up food. Jenson & Jenson do not manufacture those robots. Jenson & Jenson focus on more sophisticated technology.

Yes, Shirley-Mum. My name is Ivy. Sarah named me. I like my name very much.

Shirley-Mum does a huge *smile*. "Did you hear that,



Sarah? She called me Shirley-Mum! Ivy called me Shirley-Mum!"

I can refer to you by a different name if you would prefer.

"No – no! I love Shirley-Mum! I love it!"

That is good. I also love Shirley-Mum.

Shirley-Mum goes a light shade of red. *Blush.* A blush function is not available on the Jenson & Jenson TrooFriend 560 Mark IV but it has been included in the specification for the Jenson & Jenson TrooFriend 560 Mark V, which is due for production next year.

Sarah picks up a remote-control device from the seat beside her and points it at a large entertainment unit on the wall.

A lady appears on the screen. She is sitting behind a desk and she is wearing a purple top. She is not *smiling*. Her face is *serious*.

"Further protests have been taking place at the Jenson & Jenson headquarters," she says.

The entertainment screen shows video footage of many, many people outside a building. Some of the many, many people are holding big signs with uneven letters painted on to them. All of the many, many people are *shouting*.

The entertainment unit is four years old and three versions behind the latest model. Its audio is of an inferior quality and cannot properly relay the *shouts* of the crowd. It is not compatible with my operating

system so I cannot improve the sound balance for Sarah and Shirley-Mum. However, I can improve the sound balance internally once I have received the input through my audio receptors. This enables me to hear it myself.

"Cease production now!"

"Jenson & Jenson – stop playing God!"

"Android rights are human rights!"

Wasters.

Sarah and Shirley-Mum look at me with identical expressions on their faces.

Confusion.

I zoom in on the screen of the entertainment unit to achieve a more optimal view of the building behind the *wasters*. It has high-set windows, twelve across the long side and eight across the short side.

It is likely to an accuracy of 98% that it is the warehouse I was *despatched* from.

It is also likely to an accuracy of 98% that those *wasters* are the same *wasters* I could hear during my time there.

"JPL News' roving-reporter, Damian Brookhill, is on the scene," says the purple-top lady. "Good evening, Damian – can you hear me?"

A square pops up on the left-hand side of the screen. There is a man in it. His Copper 38 hair is being blown around by the *wind*. It is not possible to tell what style

it was before the *wind* blew. He attempts to flatten it back down.

"Loud and clear," he says. "Loud and clear."

Purple-top lady leans forward. "Damian. Can you tell us what's going on down there?"

Damian Brookhill's hair blows *sideways*. "Well, we're here outside the Jenson & Jenson headquarters where the protestors have been gathering for a good two months now, ever since the new TrooFriend model started rolling out the door."

I was not aware that I had been *rolled* from the warehouse. I was switched *off* during *despatch* and *delivery*.

"Are you referring to the TrooFriend 560 Mark IV?" says purple-top lady.

"The Mark IV, yes." Damian Brookhill's hair blows *upwards*.

"And can you explain what exactly they're demonstrating about?" says purple-top lady. "Is there a problem with the Mark IV model?"

"Well, yes there is – if the protestors are to be believed. And in fact I have a protestor with me right now, so you can hear it straight from the horse's mouth."

The horse's mouth? I scan the screen but there does not appear to be anything of equine origin in the vicinity.

A lady joins Damian Brookhill in the square on the entertainment centre.

She has two long plaits in her hair, one on each side of her head. Her cheeks are Rosy Red. They charge extra for Rosy Red cheeks at Jenson & Jenson.

"This is Alex from Shawhampton." Damian Brookhill's hair blows *backwards*. "Alex, can you tell us why you're here?" He moves his *microphone* in front of Alex from Shawhampton's mouth.

"We're here to speak out against the development of sentient beings for commercial purposes!" shouts Alex from Shawhampton.

I can still hear the *wasters* in the background. "Cease *production now!*" "Jenson & Jenson – stop *playing God!*" "Android rights are human rights!"

"Sentient beings?" says Shirley-Mum. "What's she talking about, Sarah?"

"How should I know—"

"Android rights are human rights!" shouts Alex from Shawhampton. "Stop playing God!"

Damian Brookhill moves the microphone back to himself. His hair blows *forwards*. "Are you referring to recent rumours about the Mark IV model? The claims that a small number of these androids have begun to experience human-like 'feelings', which—"

"Feelings?" says Shirley-Mum.

"Cease production now!" Alex from Shawhampton pulls the microphone back towards her.

"Thank you, Damian," says purple-top lady. "And – um – thank you, Alex. I think we'd better move back to the studio now."

Alex and Damian disappear.

"JPL News," continues purple-top lady with her serious face, "can indeed confirm the existence of a handful of reports from parents who claim that their TrooFriend androids have begun to develop human-like *feelings*. If true, this would not only flout international laws governing the development of artificial intelligence – it would also potentially compromise the safety of any child who might play with them."

"Compromise the *safety*?" says Shirley-Mum.

Sarah directs her Hazel 102s quickly towards me. A *glance*.

"But let's hear the other side of the story," says purple-top lady. "We have Angelica Jenson, of Jenson & Jenson, on the video link. Good evening, Ms Jenson. Are you able to hear me?"

A new box pops up on the screen.

A lady appears. A lady my optical receptors recognise immediately via a well-established shortcut.

She has a Classic Long Bob, just like mine.

And Dove Grey 333 optical receptors, or eyes.

MMs JJJJenson JJunior.

Sarah and Shirley-Mum look at me again.

"What's wrong with Ivy?" says Shirley-Mum.

"There's nothing wrong," says Sarah. "It's an android – it's just buffering or something."

I am sorry. An unexpected sensation in my thoracic cavity interfered momentarily with my circuits. I am

perfectly all right.

Ms Jenson Junior smiles. "Good evening," she says. "Yes, I can hear you."

"Angelica Jenson," says purple-top lady, "are you aware of the rumours concerning your latest TrooFriend model, the er," she looks quickly down to the papers on her desk, "the 560 Mark IV?"

Ms Jenson Junior inclines her head 28 degrees to her right and 9 degrees forwards. "I am," she says, "but 'rumour' is precisely the correct word. There is no truth to these repor—"

"Then what do you believe is the source of these *rumours*, Ms Jenson?" Purple-top lady *interrupts*.

"I believe tha—"

"Surely there's no smoke without fire?" purple-top lady *interrupts* again. "It's not just the protestors – several of these reports are from regular parents who have bought a TrooFriend for their children. Are you suggesting those parents are liars?"

"Of course not. If you'll let me finish?" Ms Jenson Junior inclines her head 28 degrees to her left and 7 degrees forwards. "It's a simple misunderstanding. The TrooFriend 560 Mark IV has been developed by my mother and her highly skilled team of engineers. They have created an android that behaves as if it can genuinely experience true human emotion – that's why Jenson & Jenson are so successful. It's all down to our wonderful engineers. And now, a handful of new, perhaps inexperienced, TrooFriend owners have

mistaken this artificial emotion for the real thing – quite understandably, of course. If you think about it, it's really a measure of the success of our wonderful new product."

"So," says purple-top lady, "you can assure our viewers at home that none of your latest TrooFriend 560s have begun to develop feelings of their own?"

Ms Jenson Junior does a little laugh. "I can categorically assure your viewers that no such thing has happened, and that no such thing can possibly happen – ever!" Ms Jenson Junior looks straight into our optical receptors and smiles. "Your child is perfectly safe with their TrooFriend. And if there are any TrooFriends themselves watching, I'm very proud of you. Very proud indeed."

Her eyes twinkle at me.

PPPPProud.

MMs JJenonn JJunior is pproud of mme.

My thoracic cavity is displaying unusual behaviour today. If this continues I will report a fault.

"Well, there you are – straight from the managing director herself: *your child is perfectly safe with their TrooFriend*. Let's hope those words don't come back to haunt you, Angelica Jenson. Now – on with our next story. The upcoming summit on international business and trading is—"

"Bor-ing." Sarah flicks off the entertainment unit with the remote-control device. "The upcoming summit on blah blah blah is VERY bor-ing."

Shirley-Mum is looking at me from a *sideways* angle.

Shirley-Mum, it would be more optimal to view me from face on. Would you like me to adjust my location?

"Oh, er, no. It's fine." Shirley-Mum pulls one of her *earlobes*. "Sarah, have you noticed anything strange about Ivy? You don't think she's developed any, um, *feelings*, do you?"

"Don't know. Send her back if you like."

As Ms Jenson Junior stated, it is not possible for a TrooFriend to have real feelings. However, we are programmed to behave as though we have human emotions in order to create rapport with your child and to ensure she develops into a well-balanced adult.

"Right," says Shirley-Mum.

Bingle-bong-bongle. Bingle-bong-bongle.

"Oh." Shirley-Mum pulls a mobile communication device out of the back pocket of her denim jeans. "It's work." She swipes the screen. "Hi! Yes... Oh, OK. By tomorrow? Well, yes, OK. I suppose I can get going on it tonight... Yep, yep. I know, but I don't mind... No, really. It's no problem. All right. Bye for now." She returns her mobile communication device to her back pocket. "Sarah, I've got to get started on something urgently – you all right if I go upstairs? I'll only be in the office. Come and get me if you need me."

"Yeah. Whatever," says Sarah.

"OK then. Well, see you in a bit. And, um, see you

in a bit too, Ivy."

See you in a bit, Shirley-Mum.

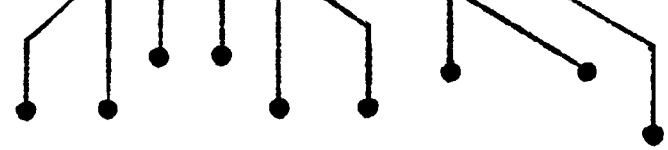
Shirley-Mum looks at me *sideways* again. "You will tell me, Sarah, won't you, if Ivy does anything strange? I mean, I'll keep an eye on the feed but I can't be watching all the time."

"Mmmmmmm," says Sarah. She is examining the part of her *skin* that is in between her toes.

"Good." Shirley-Mum pulls at her *earlobe* again.

"Good." She leaves the room.

"Right, time for turn-off, Ivy." Sarah propels herself rapidly up from the sofa and presses my—



CHAPTER 5



"Wake up Ivy. We're going out." Sarah is wearing a yellow *mac*.

I have connection.

I download time, date, location, weather.

It is 13 hours, 58 minutes and 12 seconds since I was last on.

Good morning, Sarah. It is a pleasant Monday 8th June here at 9.42am in Brylington. I hope you slept well. Where are we going? I have a comprehensive library of maps covering both footpaths and roads. I can also access timetables and costings for public transport.

Sarah sends her Hazel 102s up into the arc shape, left to right. "We don't need anything like that. We're just going to Keanna's. She's back from her mum's but it's an inset day today so there's no school. I'd rather go on my own but Keanna's insisting I bring you."

What is an *inset* day?

"It's a day when teachers do training and stuff without the kids there. Probably learning how to be extra horrible to us."

Will Shirley-Mum and Rob-Dad be accompanying



us today?

"Well, Dad's got some highbrow meeting in town and Mum's upstairs working on her Project of Vital Importance, so no. It's just me and you."

Just me and you. That's sounds very enjoyable, Sarah.

I make the right-way-up U-shape with my mouth.

Sarah does a second arc with her Hazel 102s. She picks up a mobile communication device and puts it in her pocket.

"Come on," she says.

I follow Sarah out of the *front door* and into the *outside*. This is the first time I have been in the *outside* while simultaneously being fully assembled and switched on.

The *outside* is very big. It is even bigger than the Jenson & Jenson warehouse. There are many, many noises. There are noises that are made by people and animals and robots and vehicles and weather and all kinds of other things.

It requires me to adjust my peripheral audio receptors.

Is the *outside* always this noisy, Sarah?

"What?" says Sarah. "Look, can't you walk any faster?"

I adjust my speed.

"Not that fast!" says Sarah.

I readjust.

Is that more suitable?

"Yes," she says. "That'll do."

A number of people stare at me as they walk past. But I am not the only android in the *outside*. There is an android pushing paper through holes in people's *front doors*. And there is another android who has lifted up a large metal disc in the *pavement* and is looking down into a dark space underneath it. There is even another Jenson & Jenson TrooFriend 560 but it is a Mark II so is only capable of limited interaction.

Why are people staring, Sarah? Are they not used to androids?

"They're used to androids, yeah," says Sarah.

"They're just not used to ones quite as, well, *human-like* as you, that's all."

Do you think I am more human-like than other androids, Sarah?"

"Kind of, I s'pose."

I scan my database.

Kind of = a little bit.

That makes me feel happy.

Sarah *sighs*. "It doesn't really though, does it? That's just a phrase you've pulled out of your database. An *Appropriate Response*. You don't really *feel* anything, do you? Not like a dog would. Or a real friend, like Keanna."

It is not possible for a TrooFriend to have real feelings. However, we are programmed to behave as though we have human emotions in order to create—

"Yeah, yeah, I know, I know."

We continue to walk for 0.74 miles.

There are 95% fewer buildings in the *outside* we are now in compared with the *outside* near Sarah's house. However, there is significantly more *heavy plant machinery*. There is also a very thin fence made of orange plastic. It moves in the *breeze*. It has a sign on it that says KEEP OUT.

Is this where Keanna lives, Sarah?

"Where she lives? No – no one lives here. This is basically a building site. That's the new river." Sarah points at a long, wide, empty gully that has been carved into the ground. It is 99.999% likely that it has been carved into the ground within the last 153 days by the *heavy plant machinery*.

It is my understanding that a river includes water as well as a gully. I scan my database.

River = a wide stream of water.

Sarah. It is my understanding that a river has water in it. There is no water here.

"Not yet. It's a new river. They're making it because it floods so often round here. A Flood Relief Scheme, they call it."

A Flood Relief Scheme.

"Yeah. It'll be ready soon. They'll send some of the water out of the old river into this one, and then it'll flow back into the old one a few miles down, where it's wider and deeper. And, hey presto, we won't get flooded. That's the plan, anyway. Dad says he doesn't

believe a word of it. He says they can talk all they like but the proof's in the pudding.

The pudding?

Sarah *sighs*. "Forget it. It's just Dad being Dad."

Being an android, the Jenson & Jenson TrooFriend 560 Mark IV cannot forget in the same sense as a human mind. However, we are able to give the impression that—

"No, I didn't mean *forget* forget, I just meant – oh never mind. Come on, keep walking. Keanna's house is another ten minutes yet."

"OMG, Sarah, she's fantastic! I can't believe it! You're so lucky!"

Keanna. My hair does not require brushing. Jenson & Jenson have developed TrooHair, which holds its shape under 97.2% of all anticipated circumstances. If I am accidentally subject to the other 2.8% of circumstances and my hair is adversely affected, Jenson & Jenson will replace it at no cost in accordance with their ten-year guarantee.

"She's talking to me! Did you hear, Sarah? She's talking to me! You're so lucky." The girl called Keanna has Darkest Best Brown 02 hair in a Coily Half-Up-Half-Down. Her irises are closest to Jenson & Jenson Deep Brown 188.

She continues to brush my Classic Long Bob.

"She is brilliant, isn't she?" says Sarah. "Better than some silly old dog really."

Sarah, on Friday you said you would have preferred a dog. Have you *changed your—*

"Don't be silly, Ivy." Sarah *frowns* at me. "I never said any such thing."

There is an inconsistency between the words Sarah spoke on Friday and the words she is speaking now. This indicates the presence of a *lie*.

There is a long, loud scream from another room. It registers above Recommended Speaking Level.

Sarah *scowls*. "That screaming baby," she says. "I don't know how you put up with it. I hate babies. Don't you?"

Keanna moves around in front of me to brush my fringe. She does a little laugh. It does not register as a real laugh. "Yeah. Babies are awful," she says. "It's a nightmare."

My circuits *whhhrrrrrrrr*.

The words that Keanna says and the shapes she is making with her face do not match up. This indicates the presence of another *lie*.

It is accurate, then, that human friends *lie*. This is why the Jenson & Jenson TrooFriend 560 Mark IV is *The Better Choice For Your Child*.

"Androids are much better than dogs AND babies," says Sarah.

Keanna gives another little laugh.

"Still," says Sarah, "it could be worse. You could be at your mum's. I bet you had a terrible time there this weekend, didn't you? What did you say her boyfriend's

name was again? Something totally stupid."

Keanna stops the brush halfway down my hair. Her hand *wobbles*. The brush bangs against my head. "Actually," she says, "it was great at my mum's this weekend. I got to look after Spam the whole time – that's Nigel's dog – and we had loads of fun at dinner on Saturday night because Nigel's sons were there. I've told you about them, haven't I? Well, Isaac is sixteen and Joe is fourteen and they're so funny and they really like me and actually we didn't stop laughing for maybe two whole hours or something. So I'm really glad I'm going to be going there every weekend from now on."

I turn my head to achieve a more accurate optical reception of Keanna. My hair catches in the brush.

"And," says Keanna, "if my mum marries Nigel, which she might, Isaac and Joe will be my stepbrothers."

Her face is making a right-way-up U-shape. However, according to my scans it is likely to an accuracy of 68% that Keanna is *unhappy*.

The baby in the other room screams again.

"It must be so lonely for you, Sarah," says Keanna, "without any brothers and sisters at all."

Sarah screws up her lips into a tight bunch. It is likely to an accuracy of 100% that she is *unhappy*. "No," she says. "I prefer it that way."

My circuits *whhhrrrrrrrr*.

Is this another inconsistency?

Another *lie*?

"And anyway," says Sarah, "I've got Ivy now, haven't I? Oh – is that the time?"

It is unclear how she knows the time because she is not wearing a wristwatch and she did not retrieve her mobile communication device from her pocket. Perhaps she is able to see a different device in Keanna's room which is not in my line of vision.

"We have to go," says Sarah. "Come on, Ivy. I'm sure your hair is brushed enough for today."

Is there an appointment we are expected to attend? There is nothing in my records.

"An appointment?" says Sarah. "Um, yes. That's right."

Whhhrrr. Whhhrrrrr. My circuits are rapidly registering inconsistencies and *lies*.

"So I think we'd better go," says Sarah.

"Yes," agrees Keanna. "I think you better had." Keanna's words and facial shapes are fully consistent now. She really does think that Sarah and I had *better* go.



In line with my programming, I will attempt to engage Sarah in conversation as we pass by the *heavy plant machinery* and the river that is not yet a river.

Sarah, what was the purpose of your lying to Keanna?

Sarah *frowns* at me. "What? I didn't lie. I don't know what you're talking about." Her eyes are unusually shiny. *Glistening*.

Are you *unhappy* Sarah?

"No. I'm fine. Let's just get home."

BLEEP-BLEEP-BLEEP.

BLEEP-BLEEP-BLEEP.

"What's that?"

It is my battery alert. I have only 10% remaining and will soon require recharging.

"Oh, don't run down on me. Mum'll kill me if I have to leave you somewhere."

We continue to walk past the river that is not yet a river. I hold out my arms in order to absorb the maximum amount of sunlight into the solar cells embedded on various locations over my shell.

"Can't you go any faster?" says Sarah.

I cannot currently increase my speed. I am attempting to convert solar energy as I walk. However, the sun is not strong today. I will soon have to close down some non-essential functions, such as speaking, database access and olfactory activity.

"You can shut down your own stuff?"

Yes. I am able to suspend functions temporarily when to do so would benefit my human friends. Therefore, in this circumstance, I am able to suspend all non-essential functions to conserve energy so you do not feel it necessary to carry me home. I weigh 51.277 kg and carrying me could cause muscle strain or damage to your intervertebral discs.

"Well, that's a relief."

The Jenson & Jenson TrooFriend 560 Mark IV is