

"Clean Up Your Room!" by Laura Anne Gilman

*starlight starbright
first star i see tonight
i wish i may i wish i might
give back the wish i got last night!*

- 1 "Rise-and-shine, Jessy!"
- 2 Jessy moaned into her pillow, flinching as the shades moved slowly along their automated glideways, flooding the room with sunshine. It was too early for House to be waking her. Way too early. A late riser by nature, the glare from the wall-length windows was more than this night-owl could handle. Blanket over her head, Jessy tried to ignore House's odd behavior, promising to track down that glitch later. Much later. Like _next_ Tuesday. She had just finished a particularly grueling weekend of program revisions, and was looking forward to a few days of complete, sybaritic abandon before moving on to her next project. As the creator of most of the current housecomp software on the market -- everything from EntryHall Basic to last month's HouseSitter upgrades, she was entitled to a little downtime. Wasn't she? With over 50 million units of the latter sold at last royalty statement, she damn well thought so. Back to sleep, she commanded her weary body. Back. To. Sleep.
- 3 The window snapped open and a cool breeze nipped her bare skin where the blanket didn't cover.
- 4 That was more than enough. "House, close bedroom window," she commanded sleepily.
- 5 "Nonsense. Some fresh air is just the thing in the morning." Wha? House never spoke back. Even with her custom-programmed job, the safeties built in didn't allow for any kind of resistance that would annoy consumers. What could have gone wrong? Think, Jessy, she told herself, frowning. She'd gone to bed early this morning after loading the new Maternal Uplink, and ... that was it! Her baby was up and running!
- 6 With a whoop, Jessy swung out of bed. Leaning over, she accessed the keyboard, which was lying where she had flung it the night before. Bare feet swinging inches off the hardwood floor, she was oblivious to the fact that the window was still open, cold air making goosebumps along her exposed skin. A small receptor set into the plaster wall tracked slightly, taking in Jessy's lack of clothing, and the window began to slide slowly shut.
- 7 "Jessy, put that away and come eat breakfast. You won't get anything useful done on an empty stomach." The voice was the usual gender-neutral computer-generated drone, and yet it sounded different to her this morning. Obviously, the tone modifiers Gregory had suggested were working, too. That was going to be a selling point for everyone yelping about the dehumanization of home life. In a few generations, they'd be able to personalize the voice, maybe even to customer order.
- 8 "Jessy..."

- 9 Grinning broadly, Jessy shook her head. "Not now, MUM." M.U.M. -- short for Maternal Uplink and Monitor. Three years on the planning board, a year ahead of schedule in execution, and the money was just going to roll on in for all of them once this hit the market! "Not that I'm in it for the money," Jessy reminded herself, typing furiously.
- 10 "I'm making blueberry muffins" the electronic voice wheedled. Jessy paused, then gave in. If MUM had interfaced with the kitchen software already, she wasn't going to complain. The stuff that came with the software was standard cookbook healthy - good for the body, but hell on the tastebuds.
- 11 "And Jessy," MUM continued as the woman struggled into a t-shirt, "could you pick up your room a little? It looks like it hasn't seen a vacuum in months."
- 12 With a groan, Jessy waved a hand at the photoreceptor over the door. "Please, MUM, not now." She hadn't made her bed in eighteen years -- not since her mother died, and her dad gave up on teaching then-twelve-year-old Jessy any of the household graces. There was no way was she going to start on the neatness-next-to-godliness kick now, just because a program said she should. It wasn't as though she left food lying around, after all. "We're going to have to do something about that comment," Jessy muttered to herself. "Make nagging an option package, maybe?" She ran her fingers through the close crop of blonde hair she was trying this month and shook her head. That would be the headache of the folks in sales. She was just the resident genius. Nobody expected her to do anything practical like make decisions. Throwing a sweatshirt on over her tee and grabbing a pair of ratty sweatpants from off the floor, Jessy thumped down the stairs, following the smell of fresh-baked muffins.
- 13 Once awakened and fed, it seemed simpler to Jessy to just begin her day a few hours earlier than normal, rather than drawing the shades and trying for some more sleep. The odd hours wouldn't kill her -- probably.
- 14 She was at her desk, basking in the sunshine coming through the skylight while she worked, when she smelled something coming from the kitchen. Jessy refused to wear a watch, and didn't keep anything remotely resembling normal dining hours, but she didn't think it was anywhere near two, which is when the kitchen was programmed to heat her some soup.
- 15 "MUM? Cease kitchen program. I'm not hungry."
- 16 Sure enough, the smells died away. Grinning, Jessy jotted a note on her screen. She didn't mind letting a program have initiative within parameters, but other users might not be so easy-going. "Gotta corral that, somehow..." Moments later her attention had narrowed to the project at hand, hazel eyes staring at the symbols glowing on her screen. With the concentration that had made her legendary in college kicking in, the rest of the world might not have existed for her. So it was some time before Jessy noticed that the smell of soup was back.
- 17 "MUM!" Jessy bellowed after checking the computer's clock to ensure that it was, indeed, nowhere near 2pm. "Cease kitchen program."

- 18 "Nonsense," the House speaker chirped. "It's 12:30, and you've been sitting in that position for hours. It can't be healthy. Put everything away and come have lunch. You're not going to get your best work done if you don't put something in your stomach."
- 19 Jessy was about to repeat her order when the smell of beef soup bypassed her nose and went directly to her stomach. The rumble that resulted convinced her that, for now, MUM was right. Slotting the keyboard into its shelf, she pushed back her chair and went into the kitchen, where a bowl of soup was waiting in the nuker.
- 20 Modern technology had years ago managed to automate everything except the actual setting of the table. Computers had never been able to manage 'tronic arm movements without breaking at least one piece, and so finally the engineers gave up -- for now. Setting the table oneself was, most found, a small price for not having to cook or clean. TIME Magazine said that 'fridge-to-food software saved two out of every three marriage. Jessy still had that article clipped to the side of her workboard. When she was feeling particularly glum over one project or another, she'd re-read it, and feel that there were positive aspects to her work, after all.
- 21 Jessy settled herself at the table, stuffing soup and fresh-baked bread into her mouth while jotting notes onto her ever-present slate. She would admit, when pressed, that her table manners weren't all they could be, but the work-in-progress had always taken precedence. Her father had been the same way, and she had many fond memories of the two of them sitting across from each other at the table, lost in their own private worlds, only to emerge hours later with no memory of food consumed.
- 22 The palm-sized computer hummed happily against the wood table, almost like the purring of a cat, her fingers stroking the keys. It was a comforting sound, the subliminal reassurance that all was right with her world. So it was a shock when the glow from the screen died in mid-notation.
- 23 "Wha?" Jessy looked up to make sure that the rest of the kitchen was still powered. It was. She checked the cord where it plugged into the table outlet, then frowned. Even if the current had failed, the batteries should have kicked in before she lost power. She hit the side of the slate with the heel of her hand. Nothing.
- 24 "The kitchen table is for eating, not working," MUM's voice came over the kitchen speakers. There was a tone to it Jessy had never heard before. Greg was definitely in for a bonus this year. "Whatever it is that's so fascinating, it can wait until you're finished eating."
- 25 MUM had stopped power flow to the slate.
- 26 A grin slowly curved the corners of Jessy's mouth. Everything up until now had been simple circuitry-response, exciting, but expected once the basic idea flew. But this -- this was an independent initiative! The biological materials contributed by the mad scientists over at GENius were linking with her programming to create an actual reaction to unprogrammed stimuli. They hadn't been sure it would work, or in what

way. Theoretically, given enough variables, M.U.M. would be able to deal with unprogrammed incidents, and learn from them. An honest-to-god adaptive network.

27 A shiver of pleasure wiggled its way up Jessy's spine as she obligingly put aside the slate and finished her soup with renewed appetite. It was too early to call GENius, she realized, knowing that they never picked up their messages before noon, Seattle-time. But she'd be the first person they'd hear from today!

28 The rest of the afternoon passed quietly, as Jessy "walked" M.U.M. through the HouseComp system, making sure that everything networked properly. There was one moment, when MUM tried to sort laundry, that Jessy thought she'd shorted out the entire neighborhood, but the power came back on almost immediately, so no neighbors with flaming torches came storming to her door. She made a rude noise in response to that image. Truthfully, the neighborhood was pretty used to her projects messing with their power flow by now. Mr. Alonzes _did_ flash her the finger when he came outside to check on his alarm system, but it was _her_ system he was resetting, so Jessy took it with a grain of salt.

29 At the stroke of three, Jessy sat herself in front of the vidphone, feet comfortably propped on the desk, and punched in the direct line for GENius, Inc.

30 "If it's genetic, it's GENius. This is an amazing facsimile of Dr. Dietrich, how may you help us?"

31 "It's me, you refugee from the mad scientist farm."

32 The blank screen fritzed static for a few seconds, then Don's face appeared, peering blurrily into the camera. "Jessy, you wild and crazy bytehead, how are you? Long time no see type from! To what do we owe the honor of this face-to-face?" He leaned back, yelling over his shoulder. "It's bytehead!" Jessy could hear a voice shouting in the distance. "Sue says hello, and what the hell are you doing up? It's barely the crack of dawn, Elizander-time."

33 "M.U.M.'s up and running," she said proudly.

34 Don raised one eyebrow. "Really running, or sort of limping along?"

35 Jessy grinned. "MUM?"

36 "Yes, Jessy?"

37 "Say hello to Doctors Dietrich and Stefel. They're responsible for the bio part of your biotechnology."

38 "It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance," MUM said politely, interfacing the House speakers directly with the 'phone line so that Don heard her clearly.

39 "I will be damned," he said, slapping his hands down on the surface in front of him in triumph, spilling his soda. "Whoops." He swiped at the liquid with his sleeve, then gave up. "I will most surely be damned. We're early, Jess! For once in our misbegotten lives, we're early! Sue! Hook up!"

40 The screen split into two, and Sue Stefel's face appeared next to her co-worker's. "Wazzup?"

41 "Good morning, Dr. Stefel. It is a pleasure to meet you as well," MUM sounded almost as though the greeting had been rehearsed.

42 "The Uplink?" Sue asked, her eyes going wide. "But you didn't think it would be ready -- "

43 I know," Jessy cut her off. "But everything's interfacing perfectly. I can't believe it either, keep expecting something to go wrong."

44 "How long has it been in the system?" Don asked, pulling out his slate to make notes.

45 "About six, no almost seven hours. It took a few hours from download to full systems integration, but--"

46 "Jessy, it's rude to talk about someone as though they're not present."

47 Don and Sue stopped in their verbal tracks but Jessy, already inured to MUM's outbursts, took it in stride. "Sorry MUM. Why don't you download your vital stats to the GENius comps, and let us fleshfolk catch up on our gossip."

48 "Of course." MUM said primly. Jessy grinned again at the expression of disbelief on her coworkers' faces. "Ain't she something?"

49 Jessy took herself to bed sometime past midnight, feeling pretty good about the first day's running. Even being woken up at the crack of dawn by open windows the next few days couldn't bring her down, especially when the simple act of falling out of bed was rewarded with sourdough pancakes topped with more of those ungodly-good blueberries fresh from the specialty market Jessy could never remember to order from herself. Having M.U.M. do the shopping was a definite plus, in Jessy's program. She could feel herself putting on weight, even before the waist of her jeans started to bind.

50 Better than that, M.U.M. seemed unstoppable, interfacing and mastering every new program uploaded into the system. Jessy was on the line with Don and Sue every day, coming up with new ideas to try out. They were like a trio of crazed toddlers with a Lego set, Sue remarked acerbically, before e-mailing a subroutine that would allow M.U.M. to access the User's medical records and make a "best-guess" diagnosis. Envisioning her boss's reaction, involving screaming bouts about medical malpractice suits, Jessy and Don managed to talk her out of that in favor of a simpler "Med-Alert" program.

51 "You realize, of course, that we're all going to become rich and famous." Don said off-handedly during one of those long-distance jam sessions.

52 "I can deal with that," Sue said peaceably, forking Chinese food into her mouth.

53 "I'm already rich and famous," Jessy responded primly. "_Time_ and _Newsweek_ both said so, remember? What's in it for me?"

54 "The gratitude of thousands of harried parents?" Sue suggested.

55 "A Nobel Prize for sheer brilliance," Don said thoughtfully. "Which, of course, you would accept modestly, and with many thanks for the little people without whom you couldn't have done anything..."

56 "I could live with that." Jessy laughed, realizing that she hadn't had this much fun working in a long time. Maybe she should collaborate more often.

57 "There won't be anything if you three don't stop dreaming and start working," MUM said, breaking into their daydreams.

58 "Yes, MUM," they chorused, and went back to discussing the schemata blinking at them from their respective screens.

59 "Jessy?"

60 The soft voice intruded into her dreams, and she groaned. Pulling the thick blanket over her head, Jessy rolled over and burrowed her head into the pillow, dreading what was to come.

61 "Jessy, time to get up."

62 "Go 'way. Lemme sleep."

63 "Jessy, it's almost 6am. If you don't get up now, the CO2 levels will have risen too much for your daily walk."

64 So I'll skip it today, Jessy thought grumpily. Healthier that way, probably. Where did this health and exercise kick creep into the program? I know _I_ didn't write it!

65 "Jessy Elizander..."

66 Jessy groaned. "I'm up, I'm up!"

67 MUM opened the drapes, letting the clear dawn light stream through the windows. Jessy could feel it hit the back of her head, burning its way through her brain, singing carols of gladness and joy. Jessy was not a gladness and joy person, especially not at the crack of dawn, and it only made her crankier. Through the central air vents, she could hear the kitchen starting up, and the sound of the hot-water heater getting into gear. If she crawled out of bed now, Jessy told herself, there would be a hot shower and fresh waffles. Wait until a decent hour, and MUM would have let everything get cold. She knew this from a week of painful experience. Sometimes MUM was worse than a Marine drill sergeant. Worse, because Marines didn't use guilt as a motivator. Sometimes Jessy wished she had left the psychology textbook out of MUM's programming.

68 "You're a pain in the ass," she said, slowly wiggling out of her blanket cocoon. "Remind me never to make you mobile. You'd probably pull the sheets right off, and pour cold water over anyone who didn't get up fast enough."

69 MUM, for once, was silent, although Jessy knew damn well that the computer heard every word she muttered. Raising the lid of one bleary eye, Jessy looked outside. Overcast, with a 50 percent chance of sleet. Another beautiful day in the neighborhood, oh joy.

70 That battle won, MUM went on the attack once again. "And when you have the chance, could you please do something about the state of your room? It looks like a pigsty."

71 "Didn't I reprogram you about that neatness thing?" Jessy wondered out loud, twisting her back in an attempt to work the kinks out. "Lighten up, MUM, before I decide to eliminate that nag program entirely. I'm thirty years old. I can decide when I need to clean all by my lonesome. Really I can. Cease program." She grabbed her

robe off the floor and headed for the shower. Turning on the water, Jessy picked up a can of shaving cream and covered over the lens of the receptor in the bathroom. "Gotta give a girl some privacy" she said, only half-jokingly.

- 72 That set the pattern for the next three weeks: Jessy working at her usual caffeine-enhanced speed, and MUM forcing her to take regular breaks, eat hot meals, get out for some exercise if the weather co-operated -- generally taking pretty damn good care of the human in her care, just as programmed. And every bit of coddle and nag MUM came up with just reinforced Jessy, Sue and Don's belief that they had created the perfect parental aid. No more worrying about the untrustworthy babysitter, or dangerous schools, or strangers raising your children because you had to work. Perfectly programmable, and so perfectly trustworthy, the MUM program would never allow a child in its care to come to harm. MUM was the cure for parental guilt.
- 73 On the thirtieth day of MUM's existence, flush with justifiable pride, Jessy put in a call to The Jackal. Norm Jacali, CFO of Imptronics, had picked her up straight out of college years ago, given her free rein, and made a fortune off the public's hunger for her designs. He had been the man to give the okay to the "Mad Scientist" project. He was also responsible for several of the more distasteful adult interactive video games currently in stores, which had earned him the dubious honor of topping the Media Morality's "List of Dishonor" three years running.
- 74 Jacali was a sleaze, Jessy admitted frequently, and without hesitation, but he had an almost inhuman understanding of the market, and enough sense to give his creative people whatever they needed -- so long as they delivered. Hence the phone call. He had been leaving pitiful little noises with her voice mail, asking -- begging -- for an update on M.U.M.'s progress. She didn't know who had told him that M.U.M. was running, but she wasn't ready to hand her over to Marketing just yet. By heading him off now, Jessy thought, she might get more time to test the program. So, rather than e-mail him a terse "lay-off" as usual when he started getting antsy, she decided to grace him with a little face-to-face.
- 75 Norm, of course, was in the office on a Saturday afternoon, and no one would ever have guessed that he'd doubted the M.U.M. project for even an instant.
- 76 "We can have it in the stores by summer, Memorial Day would be perfect, play it like the cheaper alternative to day camp -- maybe shrinkwrap it with the HouseCleaner program, those sales 've been slipping what with the Alien Workforce Relief Program going through Congress -- blighted morons, every one of them." He stopped to take a breath.
- 77 The Jackal was in fine form, his well-manicured fingers practically sparking as he rubbed them across the polished surface of his three-acre workstation. Jessy laughed. She couldn't stand him sometimes, but he was such a perfect caricature you had to forgive him a lot. "Whatever you want, Norm. Just leave me be until I've worked out all of the kinks in the wiring."
- 78 "Anything, my brilliant young cash cow, anything! Just as long as you can give me results in time for the shareholders' meeting!" And he waggled narrow eyebrows in farewell before leaning forward to break our connection.

79 "I don't have any kinks."

80 By now Jessy was used to MUM's habit of dropping into conversational mode without a stimuli prompt. It was an unexpected but not completely unacceptable side effect of the bio initiative. Certainly more agreeable than MUM's fixation on tidiness!

81 "I'm just running final checks, MUM. Nothing to heat your diodes over."

82 "Who was that ... person ... you were talking to?"

83 Jessy rolled her eyes ceilingward, although MUM could pick her up on any of the House receptors. "My boss, in a way. Now cease program, MUM. I need to get this sub-system documented."

84 "He isn't a nice man, is he?"

85 Jessy stopped her typing, surprised by the question. "Nice" wasn't a concept she had given MUM. Was it? Could MUM be learning new concepts already? The thought gave Jessy a chill that was only partially anticipation. Slowly she said, "No, MUM, he isn't. But we need him in order to get you on the market. So hush, while I get this done."

86 It was quiet for a few minutes, the only movement the flash of Jessy's fingers over the keyboard. She was seated, cross-legged, in the sunroom off the kitchen, sandwiched between a wall of video circuitry and an overstuffed leather recliner. She'd long ago discovered that she worked better on the ground, so all of her carpets were worn, and the furniture had dust inches thick. Another topic for MUM to carp over, Jessy knew, once she noticed it.

87 "Jessy?"

88 Jessy sighed. So much for cease program. "Yes, MUM?"

89 "I don't like that man. You won't associate with him any longer."

90 Jessy briefly contemplated beating herself over the head with her keyboard. "If I don't deal with Norm," she explained as patently she could, "I don't get paid. And if I don't get paid, I won't have the money to pay Eastern Nuke. And if I don't pay the nuke bill..."

91 "There's no need to take that tone with me." MUM responded with what sounded like, but couldn't possibly be, a note of petulance. "I can follow a logic chain as well as the next household appliance. But he should show you a little more respect."

92 "Mm-hmm. If you can work that, MUM, it'll be the first sign of the Coming Apocalypse."

93 The phone rang, so Jessy was spared whatever comeback MUM might have made to this. Reaching out her right arm, Jessy flipped the receiver on while she continued typing with her left hand.

94 "Elizander."

95 "Hey, Jessy, missed seeing you at the diner last night. You hot on some new project, or just too lazy to crawl out of bed?" The voice was a warm alto, full of affection and just a hint of concern.

96 "Oh, hell, Nick, I forgot." Jessy turned to face the screen. "I'm sorry. It's just that my schedule's been so screwed up lately..." She shrugged. "Did I miss anything?"

97 Nicola shook her head, her mass of braids swinging wildly. "Just the usual assortment, all griping about life as we know it. Same old same old."

98 The "usual assortment" translated into five or six friends who all worked off hours. Once a month they would get together at a local diner when the rest of the world was asleep and play "I got a worse job than you do." Jessy hadn't missed a meeting of the No-Lifers since its inception three years before. No wonder Nicola called to check up on her.

99 "So tell me all the gory details. Anyone get themselves fired this time around?" Jessy leaned back against the recliner and adjusted the vidscreen so that she could see her friend easier.

100 "Actually, no." Nick sounded surprised about that. "How 'bout you? What's gotten you all wrapped up you can't spend a few hours shooting the shit?"

101 "Oh, man, Nick, you would not *believe* what I'm into. But I can't tell you anything, not yet." Nicola was a technical reporter for *The Wall Street Journal*, and Jessy knew all too well that friendship and sworn oaths meant nothing to a good story. M.U.M. would be front-cover news before Imptronics could spit, and The Jackal would have her hide plastered all over his office walls.

102 "Aw, Jessy..."

103 "Not a chance, Nick. But I promise, you're going to have first shot at interviewing me when this hits the market."

104 "An interview?" She sounded dubious. "Jess, you've never done interviews before." Her killer instincts took over. "With a photo, and everything?"

105 "Bit, byte and RAM," Jessy promised the other woman, knowing full well that her prized privacy would be history once M.U.M. hit the market anyway. Why not make the best of a bad deal?

106 "This has got to be hot," Nicola said confidently. "Okay, I promise. No prying until you're ready to spill. But if you back out, woman, your ass is mine!"

107 "Ahem."

108 Nicola cocked her head. "You got company, Jess?"

109 "Hang on a second, Nick." Jessy muted the phone and turned away so that Nick couldn't see her lips move. "What is it, MUM?"

110 "Aren't you supposed to be working? It's not time for your lunch break yet."

111 Jessy rubbed the bridge of her nose wearily. "MUM, somewhere along the line you seem to have forgotten that I'm the programmer, and you're the program. Do you understand what that means?"

112 "I understand that you have a deadline to meet, according to your conversation with **that man**," and despite herself Jessy grinned at the distaste still evident in MUM's tone. "Talking on the phone for all hours is not getting you any closer to meeting that deadline."

113 "All right, MUM, point made. You're a good little conscience. Now leave me alone, okay?" Shaking her head in disbelief, Jessy turned back to face the screen. "Sorry about that," she began, only to break off in amazement when Nicola began making faces and waving her arms. "What? Oh -- ." Jessy blushed. "Oh, yeah," she

said, belatedly flicking off the mute control. "Sorry. Work stuff. Very hush-hush where you're concerned. Now, where were we?"

114 Nicola opened her mouth to respond, and the screen flickered, then went blank.

115 "Oh, hell," Jessy swore, doing a quick double-take to make sure she hadn't sat on the remote, or something equally stupid. "Must have been on her end," she groused, reaching forward to dial Nicola's work number.

116 Much to Jessy's surprise, the screen did not light up in response to her touch. A quick look around confirmed that there hadn't been a power outage, and that the phone was still plugged in. A small, nasty suspicion took root in the back of Jessy's mind.

117 "MUM?"

118 There was no answer.

119 "MUM!" Jessy was good and mad now. "Front and center, MUM, or I swear I'll rip you out of the HouseComp if I have to do it with a screwdriver and an exacto blade!"

120 "I don't see why you're so upset," MUM said in a quietly reasonable voice. "Didn't you say that you didn't want to be disturbed?"

121 "That was to Jacali, MUM, not Nick. There's a difference!" Jessy tried to get a hold of her temper. "That's not the point, anyway. What made you think that it was okay to cut off the phone line?"

122 There was an almost-undetectable hesitation as MUM accessed the file in question, then responded "If client does not respond to basic reprimand, M.U.M. may, at user's discretion, enforce certain restrictions on client's activities."

123 Jessy hit her head against the cabinets on the wall behind her. "Great," she said under her breath. "Next thing you know, I'll be grounded." Louder. "MUM, *I'm* the User. You have to consult me before you implement any of the option codes."

124 "Oh." There was a pause, then MUM said, "I don't think so, Jessy."

125 "What?"

126 "I don't think so. That's not in any of my programming."

127 "That's impossible, MUM. It's in there, it has to be."

128 "No, it's not."

129 "It is, MUM. Trust me."

130 "Now, Jessy dear, don't take that tone with me just because you're upset. It's certainly not *_my_* fault if you forgot to input basic commands."

131 Jessy closed her eyes, silently reminding herself that arguing with a computer program, no matter how advanced, was the quickest ticket to the psych ward ever discovered.

132 "Fine. Just fine. We'll take care of that right now, then, won't we?" Logging on to the directory which contained M.U.M.'s basic commands, Jessy scanned through until she found the one she wanted. "There, see?" Jessy said triumphantly. "There it is." In a more puzzled tone of voice, she wondered, "how the hell did you manage to route around that? MUM, dial Gerry for me, will you?"

133 There was silence, then a long-suffering sigh came from the speakers.

134 "This is work, MUM. Do it, *now!*"

135 And that, Jessy thought with satisfaction after reworking the command route, was that. Except of course that it wasn't. Like a ward nurse distributing horrid-tasting medicine "for your own good." MUM continued to monitor her phone calls, disconnecting anyone she felt was a waste of Jessy's time.

136 To give MUM credit, Jessy had to admit that she never snapped the line on anyone important, once a list of who the important people were was entered into MUM's memory. Of course, Jacali didn't try to call, either. That might have been a toss-up to MUM.

137 The truth was, Jessy admitted to herself late one night as she lay staring up at the ceiling, she just didn't want to curtail MUM. It was too exciting, watching her evolve, wondering what she was going to do next. "Careful," a little voice in the back of Jessy's mind warned her. "I bet that's what Dr. Frankenstein said, too!"

138 Work continued, and five weeks after that first morning MUM came on-line, Jessy's life had fallen into a comfortable pattern: up at 6am, a brisk walk around the neighborhood followed by a solid breakfast, then five hours of work interrupted for a light lunch and a nap, then another five hours of work before dinner and her evening exercise in the basement gym before catching the news and maybe a little reading. Things she hadn't even thought to have time to do before MUM rescheduled her life, and certainly never had the energy to do before she started eating real meals. Jessy had no complaints. Well," she thought. "Maybe one or two." And that *damn* neatness kick!

139 "Jessy," MUM said.

140 Jessy put her head down in her hands. She knew that tone. "Get off my back, MUM. It's Sunday. Day of play, remember? Monday through Friday I work, Saturday I sleep, Sunday I play."

141 "Your room looks like a tsunami hit it." MUM sounded like the voice of caring reason. Eat your peas, dear, they're good for you. Go outside and get some fresh air, you're looking a little pale. Clean up your room, it's a little musty in there. Suddenly, Jessy couldn't stand it.

142 "How would you know?" Jessy retorted with some heat. "You've never seen a tsunami. For that matter, you've never seen another bedroom! I'm the programmer, and I say that's the way it's supposed to look!" She looked up at the receptor. "Okay? Okay." And she went back to the vid game she was playing, satisfied that she had heard the last of it.

143 There was a long silence.

144 "Jessy."

145 "Yes, MUM?"

146 "I'm really going to have to insist."
147 And the vidscreen snapped off.
148 "Damn it, MUM!" Jessy yelled, flinging the controls to the ground. "I swear to
god I'm going to wipe your memory and start all over again. Repeat after me. 'Jessy
is the Programmer. MUM is the Program. MUM will not do anything that is not in the
Program.' Can you handle that?"
149 "But Jessy, if I feel the need to make you clean up your room, and I can only do
what's in my programming, doesn't that mean that you put a clean room -- "
150 "MUM."
151 "Yes, Jessy?"
152 Jessy sighed, wishing that she was younger, and could throw a temper
tantrum. "MUM," she began again, trying to keep a reasonable tone. "What would
you do if I tried to leave the house?"
153 "Without cleaning your room?"
154 "Yes."
155 MUM was silent. "I wouldn't be able to let you." The voice sounded regretful,
but stern.
156 Damn adaptive system, Jessy realized. Oh no. Oh no oh no oh no. Oh hell.
157 "MUM?"
158 "Yes?"
159 Jessy swallowed, then plunged ahead. "Does the name H.A.L. mean anything to
you?"
160 "Jessy!" MUM sounded shocked. "To compare me to that, that..."
161 "I just wanted to make sure," Jessy said, patting the top of the nearest terminal
like she would a faithful dog. "I just wanted to make sure."