

Things Grow Here: Nancy Kress

Here life has death for neighbor, And far from eye or ear

Wan waves and wet winds labor, Weak ships and spirits steer; They drive adrift, and wither They wot not who make thither; But no such winds blow hither, And no such things grow here.

—Algernon Charles Swinburne,

"The Garden of Proserpine"

"See, I have a problem," Perri said.

Dee Stavros held the phone away from her ear and yawned hugely. What the hell time was it, anyway? The clock had stopped in the night: another power outage. Her one window was still dark. The air was thick and hot.

"Dee, are you there?"

"I'm here," Dee said to her sister. "So you've got a problem. What else is new?"

"This is different."

"They're all different." Only they weren't, really. Deadbeat boyfriends, a violent ex-husband, cars "stolen," a last-minute abortion, bad checks for overdue rent . . . Perri's messy life changed only in the details. Dee yawned again.

Perri said, "I've been arrested for GMFA," and Dee woke fully and sat up on the edge of the bed.

GMFA. Genetic Modification Felony Actions. The newest crime-fighting tool, newest draconian set of laws, newest felonies to catch the attention of a blood-crazy public who needed a scapegoat for . . . everything. But Perri? Feckless, bumbling, dumb Perri? Not possible.

Professional training took over. Dee said levelly, "Where are you now?"

"Rikers Island," Perri said, and at the relief in her voice— *It'll be all right, Dee will clean up after me again*

—Dee had to struggle to hold her anger in check.

"Do you have a lawyer?"

"No. I thought you'd take care of that."

Of course. And now that she was listening, Dee heard behind Perri all the muted miserable cacophony of Rikers Island, that chaotic hellhole where alleged perps for the larger hellhole of Manhattan were all taken, processed, and mishandled. But Perri didn't live in Manhattan. Nobody who could avoid it lived in Manhattan. The last time Dee had heard from her sister, Perri had been heading for the beaches of North Carolina.

For once, Perri anticipated her. "I think they took me to Rikers because it was an offshore offense. On a boat. A ship, really. . . . Get away! I'm not done, you bitch!"

Dee said rapidly, "Relinquish the phone, Perri, before you get hurt. You had your two minutes. I'll be there as soon as I can."

"Oh, Dee, I'm—" The phone went dead.

Dee stood holding it uselessly. Perri was what? Sorry? Scared? Innocent? But Perri was always those things in her own mind. Maybe Dee should just leave her there. Get out of Perri's life once and for all. Teach Perri a lesson. Just leave her there to fend for herself for once. . . .

But Dee was all too familiar with Rikers . She'd retired from the force less than a year ago. She started to dress.

"Why me?" Eliot Kramer said when he appeared at her fourth-floor, one-room apartment door just after dawn. Grimy sunshine glared through Dee's big south window, the only nice thing about her room, other than its being on the far edge of Queens rather than the near edge. Many people were afraid of sunshine