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FEATURE NOVEL

MOONWALK, by H. B. Fyfe 4

NOVELETTES

BE FRUITFUL AND MULTIPLY, by Michael Shaara 45

UNTO HIM THAT HATH, by Philip St. John 118

SHORT STORIES

A LACK OF VERISIMILITUDE, by Walt Sheldon 64

WALK TO THE WORLD, by A. J. Budrys 80

HERO'S WAY, by Judith Merril 108

ARTICLES

SAUCERS IN THE BELFRY, by Larry Shaw 92

THE BIG CONVENTION, by Lester del Rey 105

REVIEW

SCIENCE—FACT AND FICTION, by George O. Smith 101

DEPARTMENTS

EDITORIAL 2

STRAIGHT, PLACE AND SHOW 79

TAKE-OFF 150

COMING EVENTS 160

COVER BY BERGEY • ILLUSTRATIONS BY EBEL • EMSH • GARI • ORBAN • RAYMOND

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BE FRUITFUL AND MULTIPLY

BY MICHAEL SHAARA

ILLUSTRATED BY EMSH

She wanted to be a mother—to have a child of her own, with everything that went with the act of birth. But she was in the wrong world for that. There was the freeze. . . .

His baby was due at four that afternoon. His baby, was all he kept thinking, his son. He lived through the long morning of that day tense-nerved and grinning. He left the office early and was home before noon.

Although he had been gone only a few hours, when he arrived home he felt a superb and wonderful joy of homecoming that he had not known since the first days of his marriage. He bounded through the door and into the kitchen of his home, caught up his wife with a great, lusty hug, and all the while said

nothing, but just stood grinning, foolishly, like a happy bull.

"My goodness!" she said. "Put me down!"

He did but kept grinning. He wanted to say all the silly things; most of all he wanted to say "little mother" so that they could both laugh at the wonder of it. He wanted to hug her, too, but now he put her down, docilely, and sat at the kitchen table and began to eat lunch.

"Did you bring the check, Dave?" his wife asked.

"Yes," he said, although he thought such a question, well . . .



inappropriate at a time like this. "But I didn't fill the name in," he said. "Are you sure you want another David?"

She nodded, her face turned away. It occurred to him for the first time that she did not look happy. On this day of all days, not happy! He was thunderstruck. He rose immediately and went to her, catching her shoulders in his hands.

"Look, honey," he said slowly, "Jean, if you don't like the name . . ."

"Oh no," she said quickly, over her shoulder. "The name is fine."

"I thought, well," he faltered, "I wanted to have him named after me, but—"

Jean turned, smiled up at him warmly.

"David's a good name. The best name." She perched on tip-toe to kiss him quickly. "Don't worry about me, darling, I'm just nervous." She walked past him to the table. "Eat your lunch," she said.

All worry flowed out of his mind. Dave sat down again, his eyes following the small, slim form of his wife as she moved in the kitchen. He grinned happily, absently ate his lunch, spilled coffee all over the table.

At three forty-five, shortly before the baby was to be delivered, they were together in the wait-

ing room. Dave by this time had commenced to twitch. There was of course nothing that could possibly go wrong. He was not bothered with that, what he was feeling now was a sensation of vast inadequacy. The stupendous prospect of being a father simply overwhelmed him. And so he smoked and twitched and stared at the waiting room door, while Jean beside him was . . . perfectly calm.

Had Dave been able to notice his wife, to see her clearly, he would have realized with alarm that she was not at all nervous. Or happy. Her face was set without lines, was cold. It was as if she was not feeling at all.

The baby, young Dave, was delivered promptly at four. He was not a beautiful baby. He was very red and noisy. The big Dave thought so but did not say so. He stood there quietly now, holding the boy, the grin long forgotten in staring at the living little thing he had created.

It was Jean who paid the check.

With a faint white hint of paleness in her cheeks, she watched as the government clerk recorded the delivery and gave her a receipt, stamped out a flowery new certificate of birth. At five after four they left the delivery room. In ten more minutes they were home, having

been gone not quite an hour.

Except for a plain table which was sunken by the wall, the freeze compartment was completely empty. Mr. Cutter felt an expectant chill at the cold bareness of the place, walked in to the center of the room and idly fingered the table. There was a port, at least. He tested and found that he could see out of it from a sitting position on the table. He was glad of that. He wanted to see open space again, to look out upon Earth for one last time.

Some of the other passengers were freezing already. Mr. Cutter could hear the clink of sealing doors down the passageway. He left the door of his own room open, sat uncomfortably on the table and stared out through the port.

He felt the ship lift under him with a sharp lurch, swore quietly at the hardness of the table. There were no more sudden moves after that, just a steady, gliding feeling of heaviness. He saw the maze that was Yorkport falling away below, fading in a cloud mist that closed in between. Gradually the white of the cloud was gone, until around him he could see only the speckled gleams of the upper atmosphere, and down below Earth was become an immense

and silvery plate, shining ever more brilliantly as he rose up into the black.

While Mr. Cutter was leaning forward into the port and staring, hands braced against the wall, a young lieutenant of the crew knocked quietly at his door. Mr. Cutter turned.

"You have an hour, sir," the lieutenant said respectfully. "Everyone must be frozen before acceleration begins."

"I know," said Cutter, and then, embarrassed: "I'd just like to . . . watch . . . for a while."

The lieutenant nodded. It was not a really unusual thing. There were still some people left who did not use the freeze fanatically, like a drug, to save for another time each possible moment of their lives. Some, but not many.

"Shall I inform you of the time?" the lieutenant asked.

"No, please," said Cutter, "don't bother. I'll go automatically with the ship. I'll make sure to strap myself in."

The lieutenant smiled amiably and left.

An hour, Cutter thought. He turned to look out of the port again. Now there was nothing there. Earth was a clear green light mixed in with the rest, mixed and lost among the billion ice chips of the stars.

After a while he left the port, wearied even of the stars, and

began to strap himself on the table. He forgot everything else now, as he often did on the table, in thinking of the freeze.

In a few moments he would be frozen, frozen as completely as anything could ever be, down to a temperature of absolute zero. Not an atom of him would move; he would have no growth or thought or life. He would lay here on the table for two years and more, and then he would be—defrosted. And he would rise up from the table, two years from now, not one second older, not one electron of his being changed—thinking, even, the same thought he had had when the freeze began.

Mr. Cutter shook his head in contemplative awe. Although the freeze had been in use for all of his life, for more than two hundred years, to Mr. Cutter it was still an incredible thing. He lay upon the table thinking about it, wondering in what new way it would affect mankind.

Look what it has already done, he thought, for medicine. And then right away he thought of Davey, his grandson. Born from a bottle. They would never have accomplished that, he thought, without the freeze. He felt a surge of pleasure. A picture of Davey floated into his mind, young, warm, healthy. Normalcy and intelligence, thought Mr.

Cutter, have come from the freeze.

Mr. Cutter closed his eyes, remembering.

In the early days of the freeze, medicine was the first to benefit. For no one could die on an operating table, that was the first thing. If the patient was failing, why, then they froze him and studied his case at length, and if it was found that he could not be saved the patient was simply left in storage. Eventually medical science would become capable of curing him. On that day—he it a thousand years in the future—he could be revived.

This was the first and most dramatic development of the freeze. The effects of it cannot be overestimated. Medicine was free at last from the waste and futility of hurry and death. The healers of men were given the most important medicine of all: Time. Time unlimited, perhaps eternal.

And therefore medical science embarked upon the most spectacular era of progress in all history. There was not an experiment which was not helped by the freeze, not a single field which did not benefit. The grafting of arms, legs, eyes, even hearts became commonplace, for the living parts could be stored indefinitely. Thus the study of

the body, frozen, became one of the most exact sciences of man. And eventually, of course, they got around to babies.

The idea of bottled babies was not new. It had been mentioned and even attempted by prominent doctors of at least three preceding centuries, was believed by some scientists to be one of the greater goals of Man. With the freeze, that goal was soon realized.

The gestation of the baby outside the human body became a possibility in August of the year 2312. It was not very well publicized at the time—the public had first to be educated. And had the bottling process remained in private hands it is very likely that the bottled baby would have long remained a rarity.

But by the time the process had been perfected, the freeze had long been in widespread, public operation. The death rate of the system had therefore fallen to an all time low. Despite two atomic wars in the XXIst Century, the ancient fear of economists — overpopulation — had become the gravest problem of the day. Immigration to the stars in large numbers was as yet unpracticable. The Federation could see no way out except through drastic measures of birth control, and those were stubbornly opposed by religious

groups. So when the bottling process came, it was a gift from the gods.

The Federation quickly took it over, and began some of the most extensive and brilliant political maneuvering in history. Slowly, quietly, the virtues of the bottled baby were inserted into the public mind. Advertising began as a mild coercion, progressed through speeches and demonstrations and campaigns to an outright demand. Prominent husbands—upon the promise of political favor—forced bottled babies on their wives. Older women took up the practice, as well as Rh negatives, and women with defective wombs and pelvises. Entertainers, businesswomen—of which in these times there were many—accepted the bottling gladly, with the result that it became first a fad, then a fashion among the leading women in the great cities of the world. Thus it began at the top, and spread with increasing vigor down through all the levels of society.

Religious sects continued to oppose the bottling, but their power slowly faded. The most important reason for this was the bottled baby itself. It had all the advantages. It was always born—or, in contemporary slang, 'un-corked'—physically perfect,

and it was almost impossible for one to be injured in the bottle. Factors like that of Mongolian birth, which is caused by lack of oxygen, disappeared entirely. And any hereditary imperfections in the embryo were discovered at an early stage—at which point the government operators quietly let the embryo die and informed the parents that the birth had not “taken.” Subtly, the Federation set out to weed out the sports and freaks of humanity and no one questioned the agencies, for there was no trouble in having another baby, at no further cost. Few people on Earth really knew what happened to the defective embryos, and few, to tell the truth, cared.

As the years passed and the bottling process ate its way into the custom and habit of Man, the Federation at last began to bear down. The great era of the battle for birth control began. But the standard of living, despite the great star conquests, was steadily decreasing, and the success of the movement was inevitable. In the year 2430, the first law was passed. The parents of all bottled babies—by this time 98% of the population—were henceforth to submit to physical and psychological tests, the results of which would determine the number of babies

they might legally have. Shortly another bill was passed limiting the number of bottled births in any one family—regardless of circumstances—to two. The same bill forbade children to moronic parents. Another fifty years, and the end of the cycle was reached. No human mother was ever again allowed to bear her baby within her own body.

Family life continued very much as it always had, but slowly the effects of the bottling began to come home. The women of Earth could bear their children early—it was simple to have a number of eggs removed from the body and frozen for use at any later time—and sterilization at government hospitals was free. Hence the women were sterilized. And freed from the fear of pregnancy, women shortly achieved one of the dreams of the ages: sexual equality with men. In consequence, the family as an institution began to fail apart. Marriage, although few then living realized it, was doomed.

In 2565 then, when Cutter began his trip to the stars, he was one of the few remaining Earthmen to have been born from a mother's body.

There was a brief, stinging buzz, and Mr. Cutter opened his eyes. The red warning light of

the freeze was on above him. Five minutes. Mr. Cutter examined his straps, found them all tight. It was very important that they did not slip, for if his frozen body worked loose and was subjected to the varied pressures of acceleration—Mr. Cutter shuddered—a piece of him could chip off. But the straps were tight and there was no worry about that. Mr. Cutter lay down and waited.

He did not bother to think about where he was going—there would be plenty of time for that later—now he thought of his daughter, Jean. He remembered her face as he had seen it last. Pale, very pale. He tried to remember when he had seen her looking well and could not. There was nothing wrong with her physically; the doctor's report had simply recommended that she be sterilized. Mr. Cutter knew what that meant. It was very common, nowadays.

Mr. Cutter shrugged sadly. Women!

And once again, as he lay there, the picture of the face of little Davey flashed gently before his mind. Small and sweet and dimpled, holding that. . . .

. . . . Scraggy little doll of his. God, he was a cute—

Mr. Cutter blinked. He blinked again, feeling the numbness of his mind. Up on the ceiling where

the red light was he looked. The light was out.

Done, he thought in wonder, just like that. More than two years already gone.

Shaking his head mutely, he began to unbuckle the straps he had tied just—it seemed—just a moment before. The freeze had come and gone, and the two year trip was done.

"She must be sterilized, Dave," said the man.

"But she won't—" Dave began.

"For safety's sake at least. Tell her that it will be for the sake of the baby." The man eyed Dave sincerely. "It's possible, you know, that she may react violently toward your baby."

Dave laid his head upon large thick hands.

"At any event," the man went on, "your wife will undoubtedly harbor some grudge against your baby, and we can't allow that. You realize, of course, how badly a child could develop under those circumstances."

"Yes," Dave said, not moving.

The man rose from the desk and came around it to stand in front of Dave.

"Come, come," he said gently, "I'm sure your wife will come round."

"I don't know," Dave muttered. "I don't know. God, how she wants a baby, wants to bear

a baby." He looked appealingly at the doctor. "What can I do? You know how women are. I thought when we had little Davey—but it didn't help. I think she loves the kid, but—"

"Is she still having morning sickness?"

Dave groaned. "Yes. She's sick almost every morning. And she tells me about a feeling she has in her stomach, and that's all she does, all the time, think about it and imagine what it would be like to have a baby."

The man smiled wanly. "The maternal urge can be a very powerful thing."

Dave rose distractedly.

"Well it's hurting her, and it's hurting the kid. And I can't reason with her. Lord, what can I do?" Dave had reached the window, and now he leaned against it and stared up into the sky. He was a rare man. The doctor did not know what to make of him. Dave loved his wife.

"She refuses to come here for treatment," said the man. "If you could get her to come here everything would be all right. Once she was sterilized—"

Dave spun savagely.

"Sterilized? She won't even hear the word! You don't know what it means to her. If I mention it even she collapses and says she'll leave me, me *and* the baby." Dave stared at the man

without hope, his shoulders slowly sinking.

"You owe it to the baby," the man said, returning to his best card. "She has a duty to the baby, tell her that. After all, he's her own flesh and blood—"

"You know what she says to that, you know what she told me? 'How do I know it's mine?' she said."

The man looked at pityingly. That was no good. Dave had no use for pity. He left.

He took the freeze tunnel home, was frozen and defrosted and on the way saved twenty minutes of his life. When he was home and met Jean she smiled excitedly at him, her hands pressed to her stomach.

"I felt *movement*, Dave," she cried, "I felt it right here!"

"Honey," Dave began huskily—

"Yes I did, I really did." She nodded her head with a quick childlike motion, tumbling the blonde curls, and drew him through the door.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful? Oh honey, wouldn't it be wonderful?" She held his arm and gazed up into his face. He looked into her eyes, her blue and shining eyes, and thought: she's forgotten again. She doesn't remember that she can't have it.

"Where's Davey?" he asked,

trying to take her mind away. Jean motioned toward the bedroom. When he started to walk away she held his arm tightly and tried to catch his eye, and said pleadingly: "I did feel movement, Dave, I really, truly did."

He didn't meet her eyes. "I know," he said, and patted her arm gently, and went into Davey's room.

When he opened the door he heard Davey crying. He picked the child up and stared at him unhappily, saw the streaks of tears on the red little face and the way the jumper was bunched in a mess.

"Jean!" he called out in sudden anger, "haven't you been looking after him? The poor kid must have been—" He held himself with an effort. It wasn't her fault. Oh Lord, it was nobody's fault.

The baby had stopped crying, was reaching out a soft wet hand to play with his nose. Dave could not help but be struck again by the blue eyes. Jean's eyes, he thought, if she could only realize that. He's ours, he's healthy and he's ours, and that's all that's important.

He thought maybe he could talk about that now, so he took the baby with him and went back into the kitchen. Jean had supper ready and the baby's chair was by the table. Dave

placed the boy in it and started to say something, but just then Jean put her hands again on her stomach.

"It moved. It moved," she breathed ecstatically. "Oh Dave, come here and see!"

Dave sat for a long moment, then rose and went to her. He touched her stomach. He felt nothing. Her face fell quickly, pitifully.

"Oh, it's quiet now. Wait a minute, please, just a minute."

Dave sat next to her, trying hard to keep himself under control. He looked at her and . . . he started. He realized suddenly that she *was* getting heavy. A lance of fear hit him. Oh no, she couldn't—no, the contraceptives were a hundred percent effective. But in her state, nervous and unsleeping, why should she be heavy?

"Oh!" Jean yelped, and she grabbed his hand. "There, there! You see?"

And this time when she felt it, he felt it too.

On the fourth planet of Kuba, a star in the region of Pollux, Mr. Cutter lived alone. More or less alone, for although Mr. Cutter was the only man on the planet, he was not the only human being. He was surrounded by babies.

There were five thousand of

them, none of whom were more than ten nor less than nine months old. Their birth—they had been born on Kuba IV—had been a busy time for Mr. Cutter. Five thousand births in less than a month. Mr. Cutter had had very little time to himself. The process was fully automatic of course, but Mr. Cutter had been forced to maintain constant supervision over the apparatus, checking and rechecking the supposedly infallible un-corking and feeding machines. He had come through all right and his first year's report would soon be posted to Earth. Although several babies had been un-corked late, only one had died. There was no helping that—the bottle had cracked.

After the birth period Mr. Cutter had it relatively easy. The babies were being raised and taught mechanically, according to the system and methods of the Federation. Mr. Cutter had only to maintain a check on the apparatus from time to time, and make his own notes on the babies' progress.

As far as Mr. Cutter could tell, they were doing all right. Therefore he relaxed and began reading the books he had meant to read for a hundred years. It was, for the aging Mr. Cutter, an ideal job.

But there were interruptions.

One day, for example, there was an earthquake.

It came in the morning, rocked the whole vast building, cracked the dome in several places. Dozens of Mr. Cutter's machines were thrown out of alignment—the computers especially had a violent reaction—and the babies themselves had to be soothed with narcotics. Mr. Cutter roamed the whole building cursing, finding out what was to be done and dispatching robots to do it. In the end, when he thought he was through, he had to explain the whole thing to the main computers. Upon the basis of their given data, the analysts had only one available conclusion: the dome had been bombed. Thus Mr. Cutter found himself with neurotic machines as well as scared babies.

But in time the memory passed away, and the babies grew. Like a crop they grew, a crop of human beings. In twenty years and less, they would be working this planet, finding and controlling its materials, sending them to enrich the ravaged Solar System.

On a hundred other planets there were other domes and other babies; this was the greatest effort of the Federation. Each of the planets to which Earthmen had come would be built up and made ready for comfort-

able immigration, would be added to the strength and power of Man. Not gradually, but quickly, as quickly as possible. The long years of overpopulation, although nearly ended, had almost wrecked the System. Expansion was vital to Earthmen, and the Federation knew it. Quietly they set about the massive plan, for they knew something else.

Three intelligent races had already been discovered. Not yet advanced, but capable of advancing. Eventually there would be found a space-borne civilization on a level with Man. And Man would have to be ready.

Mr. Cutter knew all this, but did not think about it. He would be here for twenty years, here alone four hundred light years from Earth, and politics did not impress him. He read, he wrote, made a discriminate use of the freeze, and occasionally he slept.

One day he had visitors.

At the end of Mr. Cutter's first year, a Federation cruiser came down at Kuba IV, coming for Mr. Cutter's annual report. The visitors were aboard.

Mr. Cutter met the spaceship with casual interest, and was greeted—not by the expected sombre official, but by the smiling faces of his daughter, her husband, and her son. Mr. Cut-

ter was speechless with astonishment.

"Hi Dad!" Jean cried, rushing into his arms, and Dave came after, holding little Dave.

Mr. Cutter stood for a long while holding his daughter in his arms and staring at his grandson, and he could not understand it. Four hundred light years they had come to see him. Mr. Cutter blinked. Just in coming and going they would be five years away from Earth, and Dave's job, his home—

But then Jean lifted little Dave into his arms, and Mr. Cutter put off his questions. The calm official of the Federation quietly picked up Mr. Cutter's report and went back to the ship. Several minutes later, to Mr. Cutter's growing amazement, the cruiser took off.

"You're *staying*?" he cried, looking from one to the other.

Jean dimpled happily, the excitement of it gleaming in her eyes.

"Yes, Daddy. Oh, don't worry, we have permission. The authorities were perfectly willing to have us come out here to keep you company. They know we'll help you—keep you from being too lonesome anyway—and they don't have to pay us. So we can stay as long as we like."

Mr. Cutter gaped.

"You do want us, don't you

Daddy?"

"Yes, yes," Mr. Cutter stammered, and then: "Oh, yes! But—" he turned to Dave, who was standing quietly to the side, grinning as usual—"Your job, what about your job, your home?"

"I quit," Dave said simply. Then he chuckled. "I decided that since I had a father-in-law working for the government, I'd come live off him for a while. How about it, do you have enough rations, pard?"

Mr. Cutter grinned, waved a hand toward the building.

"If I can handle all of them, I guess I can feed you."

"Well," Jean said briskly, "then that's all we need."

But Mr. Cutter was still puzzled.

"What will you do? I mean, you'll be here for a long time, you know—do you want to freeze?" Suspicion hit him. "Is that it?" he said in quick disappointment, "you came out here just to get away from the law, so you could freeze for a few years?"

"Tell him, honey," Dave chuckled.

"Yes, confound it, tell me!" Mr. Cutter cried, "before I have a stroke. Your job, your home!"

"All right," Jean said soothingly. Then she looked at him proudly, with a clean, clear

sparkle in her eyes, and patted herself lightly on the stomach.

"Dad," she said, "I'm going to have a baby."

The room in which they sat was still revolving around Mr. Cutter's head, but he was slowly recovering. That he was absolutely against it they both knew, and they had known it long before they arrived, and therefore he said nothing. He had seen this coming for a long while, and it pained him to remember that he had done nothing, had not even tried to help. Maybe there was an excuse in the fact of his being a man, because he could not have been expected to understand what Jean was feeling . . . Well, he said to himself softly, no more of that. He realized now, as Dave had before him, that Jean was lost unless she had the baby, and he struggled to accept it.

"How much time?" he asked.

"About four months," Dave answered.

"Oh, my lord," breathed Mr. Cutter. He laid his head on his hands, then suddenly jerked upright.

"The ship!" he bellowed, "I've got to call the ship!" He jumped up and started for the door, but Dave caught him.

"No!"

Mr. Cutter struggled. "Don't

you see? Oh, you poor young fools! The baby, the baby"—he stammered—"who'll deliver the baby?"

Dave stared at him puzzledly while Jean, white-faced, sat tensely on the edge of her chair.

"The robots, sir," Dave said hopefully, "the mekmedics. Can't they handle the job?"

Mr. Cutter fumed.

"Of course they could, if they only knew how! But no mek-medical does know how! Obstetrics is a dead science, confound it, you should have known that!"

But Dave persisted.

"Can't they learn? I mean, couldn't we teach them?"

Mr. Cutter stopped struggling, tilted his head to glare at Dave.

"We? What could we teach them? Don't be a fool"—he paused as a thought hit him. And then he sagged a little further. "We have no books," he said desperately, "if only we had the right bo—"

Dave broke in.

"I brought the books." He pointed to a carton among the cases of their luggage. "I had a heck of a time, but I brought along every book on obstetrics I could find. We *can* do it, can't we? We can feed the knowledge to the robots—"

"No," said Mr. Cutter heavily. "Let me call the ship. It will be out of range soon and then we'll

be lost. Jean"—he turned to his daughter pleadingly—"don't do it. Don't take the chance."

Jean smiled brightly.

"What chance is there, father? Women have been having babies for thousands of years all by themselves. If worst comes to worst, why can't I?" She spoke very quickly because she realized she would have both of them against her. Dave had brought her only because he thought the mekmedics could handle the birth. The hard knot of stubbornness was again building up inside of her. Jean knew without question that she would bear this baby.

"The robots will work," she said flatly, "it's not that difficult. And if they can't, then you can." She was near to tears. "And if *you* can't, I'll have it all by myself!"

Dave looked significantly at Mr. Cutter and the old man shrugged.

"All right," he said, "we'll try."

"Now what about diet?" Mr. Cutter began.

Jean looked back at him innocently.

"What about it?"

"Well, aren't you on one?"

"No. Should I be?"

Mr. Cutter realized what he was up against. He whistled.

Dave looked on unhappily.

"I'll start one right away," Jean chimed brightly. "What should I have?"

"Who knows," Mr. Cutter muttered. "Look in one of those books. Lord, all I remember is that they used to put women on diets and—oh Lord, look in the book."

Dave went over to the carton of books, started going through it.

"Listen," Mr. Cutter said to Jean, "have you done anything at all?"

Jean flushed.

"No. I didn't know anything. Dave didn't—"

Mr. Cutter erupted in worried rage.

"How should Dave know anything? Women! Women!" He shook his head. Then another thought struck him. "I suppose you don't know what Rh factor you have?"

His answer was in Jean's frightened look.

"Oh, me," he said, and Dave began to look really worried.

"See here, father," Jean said sharply, "you're making it too hard! My goodness, everything will be all right. Women were having babies long before they knew anything about diets, and R-aitches—"

"Yes, and they were dying then too."

"Dying?" Dave yelled. "Now look—"

"All right, all right," Mr. Cutter waved a soothing hand. "Relax. We'll look everything up and do it according to the book."

He was amused, then touched by the hopeless expression on Dave's face. Mr. Cutter arose and started to leave, clapping an affectionate hand on Dave's shoulder.

"C'mon, son," he said, "let's get to this robot business. Take what books you can carry." He turned to gaze at Jean.

"Just like her mother," he said absently. And then he chuckled. "Only, a little fatter."

Before long they knew more about babies—as Mr. Cutter observed—than the Government did. They went through each of the intelligible books separately and in great detail, isolating the actual information which would have to go into the mekmedic, making absolutely certain that they did not miss a thing. Slowly they assembled the data and submitted it to the machine, and by the end of Jean's seventh month the work was completed. Every fact of the science of obstetrics which might conceivably be of use to the robot was now available to it. Their only worry now was that there was no way to run a trial. If there

was any part of the operation they had missed—Dave tried hard to relax. There was always the freeze.

"We can have the delivery performed in a freeze compartment," said Mr. Cutter. "Then if anything goes wrong we can turn on the freeze and save her, and take her back to Earth."

Dave's reply to that was simple and unnering.

"We're not doctors. How do we know when something's wrong?"

Cutter shook it off. "The freeze will save her. If her breathing falls off at all, we'll turn it on."

But Dave smiled, now, much less often.

Day by day, of course, Jean was getting bigger. And loving it. Both Mr. Cutter and Dave were softened by the sweet pleasure in her face, the glowing happy eyes that neither had seen since the first days of her marriage. She moved slowly, awkwardly, being careful of the baby—being careful was all she knew about pregnancy. They made her a diet and she stuck to it strictly, even her morning sickness never really bothered her. The phenomena of movement, the feeling that had thrilled her since the fourth month, was a constant source of delight to her. A perfect, devot-

ed mother, she could feel the baby growing and living within her, and her mind was at peace.

The last two months were going. There was nothing much to do. They sat and waited and smiled at one another, and once in a while, a long while, Mr. Cutter took time to look at his charges. At these times he became aware of a peculiar feeling within him. These babies, these *bottled* babies, he was treating like robots.

It began according to the book. There were the pains, as they ought to be, coming at intervals. They took Jean into a freeze compartment long since prepared, fussed uselessly with the operating mekmedic. Even now there was nothing they could do, for once the pains began the robot took over.

And so they paced, the two of them, as no human father had done for a hundred years, and the sweat of waiting stood out upon their brows. They paced all that day and far into the night; Mr. Cutter's duties were forgotten. And at last the baby was born.

There was a feeble piping in the corridor, a rowdy little cry that froze them both. Then the mekmedic brought the baby in, wheeled it upon a carriage they had built.

Dave did not look at it, he wanted to go to Jean. But Mr. Cutter knew that Jean would be sleeping, and held him back. Mr. Cutter was first to see the baby.

He sucked in his breath; the hair of his body rose up in revulsion and trembled. His breath kept hissing through his teeth. He had forgotten about this. This was the thing he had not remembered. The war, the last great war.

The baby was a mutant.

"What is it?" Jean asked wanly but happily, "boy or girl?"

Mr. Cutter did not look directly at her. Dave broke and went to her, buried his head silently in the bedclothes by her shoulder.

Jean stared at him, then at Mr. Cutter, then she began to tremble.

"What happened? Is it dead, is—"

"Please." Mr. Cutter grasped her hand. "No. It's all right."

"I don't believe you. It's dead. It's dead. My baby—"

"No, it isn't," Mr. Cutter said strongly. "You can hear it now. Hear?"

Down the corridor in the silence the pipe of the baby came through.

Jean lay back weakly on the bed, closed her eyes. She reached her other hand to Dave.

"Oh, Dave, honey, you frightened me. Don't worry, dear, I'll be all right."

Dave kept his head down.

Mr. Cutter was the one to say it.

"Jean—kid—it's not all right."

Her eyes flicked open again, the blue in them wide with terror. Mr. Cutter tried to keep her from speaking, began to talk quickly, imploring.

"Look—Jean—you wanted to have a baby. That's what you wanted, isn't it? Yes. That's what you wanted, that's all. Well, you've had it, dear, you've born the child and it's alive and everything's finished. Isn't that what you want?" He was pleading and holding her hand. "You have Davey, kid, you have both your boys and me, you have us, so everything's all right. You've born a baby and you have a baby, that's enough for any woman, isn't it." He said it not like a question but like the truth.

Now Jean was beginning to cry. But Mr. Cutter knew that he was right, bearing the baby had been enough. If it died it would be all right because now she was a mother, really and truly a mother. But it hadn't died. It was alive now and that was the bad thing.

Now Mr. Cutter suddenly realized what a mistake it had been to tell her that the bab

was alive. He wanted to cut that out of her mind now, make her see—

"What's wrong with my baby," she said flatly, "let me see my baby."

"Jean—"

"Let me see my baby!" She was starting to scream. Mr. Cutter knew that she should never see the baby. Not ever. When she began to scream he leaned forward and slapped her face.

"Listen, there's nothing we could have done. A long time ago there was a war. Do you remember? Yes. There was an atomic war and it pretty nearly wrecked Earth, and a lot of people got doses of radiation. Some died but most of them lived, and most of those had babies. Mutants. You know about that. They used to be very common, but they're not anymore. You know why?"

She was looking at him dully so he shook her.

"We don't have mutants anymore because babies are born in bottles now, that's why. They kill them. The Federation sees to that. They can see the mutation in the embryo and they abort it, they let it die. There'll never be another mutant Earthman. But the bad genes are still there, crooked and waiting, and every now and then they come

out." He paused, feeling his own tears.

"They came out now."

Jean was not crying anymore.

"Let me see it," she said.

"No."

"Please," she said, gripping his hand.

The old man looked at the two of them, the father and the mother, out of deeply tired eyes.

"No. It would be no good."

"I'm going to keep it," she said, closing her eyes again and setting her mouth.

Mr. Cutter's voice was harsh.

"No."

"I will!"

Mr. Cutter waited until she stopped sobbing again and opened her eyes.

"It has no arms," he said.

Jean screamed.

"And no eyes."

"Let her alone!" Dave yelled. It was the first thing he had said.

"She has to know. She has to realize." He said to Jean: "Arms aren't bad, or even eyes. They could be fixed. But there are—other things. You can't let it live, you see? It's a freak!"

He rose up tearfully and gestured with his hands.

"There's nothing like it!" he cried, "nothing on Earth, or on the planets. It isn't human. Don't you see? Look at Davey. Do you want this—" he was

stammering, he waved an arm despairingly toward the meagre wail which was coming down the corridor—"do you want *this* to be your son, Davey's brother?"

"I don't care," Jean said.

"To hell with you! How about us? How about it? It will live alone, absolutely alone. Even the hunchbacks, the midgets, all the old freaks had others like them, had brothers. But this one will have nobody. How will Davey treat it? Can you guess? How will everyone treat it? The bottles have perfected us, the bottles have made us healthy and alike, and now all men are joined together. This baby will never be a part of us, or of anything. You'll condemn it to that?"

His anger, his sorrow got to her. In a flash she saw it. But she said:

"We could bring it up away from people."

"Where?"

"There'll always be a place—"

"There'll never be a place! Jean, Jean, think about Davey!"

For the first time since his birth, Jean remembered her son with a feeling of glad, almost wild affection. Oh, Davey, Davey, there was Davey to remember. He was hers, her flesh, and he was a beautiful baby. The vision of what the other was like came horribly into her mind—a thing,

a blasted, mangled thing. She shuddered.

Mr. Cutter realized that the struggle was over and he had won. Jean was still sobbing softly. It was not quick, and she would think about it for a long time, but the worst part was done. She would be going back to Earth now, and all the wildness and rebellion would be gone. Mr. Cutter began to sag inside, feeling the weight of years and of living.

"Thank you," he said quietly. "You're a real mother now. Everything will be all right."

Mr. Cutter left the room, leaving them silent together. He came to the carriage upon which the new baby rested, crying feebly. Before he did what had to be done he paused and looked at the thing which was his grandchild.

He could not feel anything for it. The thought that it was his own grandchild revolted him. It was easy, so easy for Mr. Cutter to see that the baby was inhuman, simply because no other baby in the universe was like it.

And thank God for that, thought Mr. Cutter.

He pushed the carriage before him, moving away from Jean's room.

In a little while the last of all the imperfect ones was dead. †