# A MAN OF FAMILY

STEWART RALEY found his seat in the Commuter's Special —the stratojet that carried him every day from the Metro-politan New York Business Area to his suburban home in northern New Hampshire—with legs that literally felt not and eyes that really and truly saw not.

It was pure habit, years and years of the same repetitive act, that enabled him to find his accustomed place at the window beside Ed Greene; it was habit that pushed his forefinger at the button imbedded in the seat back imme-diately ahead of him; and it was habit that then kept him staring at the late-afternoon news telecast in the tiny seat-back screen, even though none of his senses registered a single one of the rapid-fire, excitedly announced bulle-tins.

He did hear, dimly, the scream of the jet's takeoff, but it was habit again that kept his feet firm on the floor and that tensed his abdominal muscles against the encircling safety belt. And that meant, he realized, that he was getting clos-er to a situation where habit would be of no help at all—where nothing would be of any help. Not against about the worst possible thing that could happen to a man in 2080 A.D.

"Had a rough day, Stew?" Ed Greene asked him with beery aoudness. "You look tired as hell."

Raley felt his lips move, but it was a while before sound came out of his throat. "Yes," he said finally. "I had a rough day."

"Well, and who asked you to work for Solar Minerals?" Ed asked, as if he were replying to a sharply phrased argu-ment. "These interplanetary corporations are all the same: pressure, pressure, pressure. You got to get the invoices ready right now, this minute, this second, because the Neptunian supply ship is leaving and there won't be another one for six months; you got to get the Mercury correspondence all dictated because— Don't I know? I worked for Outer Planet Pharmaceuticals fifteen years ago and 1 had a goddam bellyful. Give me the real-estate racket and accounts in the Metropolitan New York Busi-ness Area. Quiet. Solid. Calm."

Raley nodded heavily and rubbed at his forehead. He didn't have a headache, but he wished he had one. He wished he had anything that would make it impossible for him to think.

"Course, there's not much money in it," Ed went on, boomingly viewing the other side of the question. "There's not much money, but there's no ulcers either. I'll probably be stuck in a two-child bracket all my life—but it'll be a long life. We take things slow and easy in my office. We know little old New York's been here a long time, and it'll he here a long time to come."

"Yes," Raley said, still staring straight ahead of him. "It will be. New York will be here for a long time to come."

"Well, don't say it in such a miserable tone of voice, man! Ganymede will be here for a long time, too! No one's going to run away with Ganymede!"

Frank Tyler leaned forward from behind them. "How about a little seven-card stud, fellas?" he inquired. "We've got a half-hour to kill."

Raley didn't feel at all like playing cards, but he felt too grateful to Frank to refuse. His fellow-employee at Solar Minerals had been listening to Greene—as, inevitably, had everyone else on the plane—and he alone knew what anguish the real-estate man

had been unconsciously creat-ing. He'd probably got more and more uncomfortable and had decided to provide a distraction, any distraction.

Nice of him, Raley thought, as he and Ed spun their seats around so that they faced the other way. After all, he'd been promoted to the Ganymede desk over Frank's head; another man in Frank's position might have enjoyed hearing Ed sock it to him. Not Frank, he was no ghoul.

It was the usual game, with the usual four players. Bruce Robertson, the book illustrator, who sat on Frank Tyler's left, brought his huge portfolio up off the floor and placed it table-wise on their knees. Frank opened a fresh deck and they cut for deal. Ed Greene won.

"Usual stakes?" he asked, as he shuffled the cards. "Ten, twenty, thirty?"

They nodded, and Ed began to lay out a hand. He didn't stop talking though.

"I was telling Stew," he explained in a voice that must have carried clear to the pilot in his sealed-off cabin, "that real estate is good for the blood pressure, if not much else. My wife is all the time telling me to move into a more hotshot field. `I feel so ashamed,' she says, `a woman of my age with only two children. Stewart Raley is ten years younger than you and already Marian has had her fourth baby. If you were half a man, you'd be ashamed, too. If you were half a man, you'd do something about it.' You know what I tell her? `Sheila,' I say, `the trouble with you is you're 36A-happy.' "

Bruce Robertson looked up, puzzled. "36A?"

Ed Greene guffawed. "Oh, you lucky bachelor, you! Wait'll you get married! You'll find out what 36A is all right. You'll eat, sleep and drink 36A."

"Form 36A," Frank Tyler explained to Bruce quietly as he raked in the pot, "is what you fill out when you make application to the FPB for permission to have another child."

"Oh. Of course. I just didn't know the number. But wait a minute, Ed. Economic status is only one of the factors. The Family Planning Bureau also considers health of the parents, heredity, home environment—"

"What did I tell you?" Ed crowed. "A bachelor! A wet-behind-the-ears, no-child bachelor!"

Bruce Robertson turned white. "I'll be getting married one of these days, Ed Greene," he said through tightly set teeth. "And when I do, I'll have more children than you ever—"

"You're right about economic status being only one of the factors," Frank Tyler broke in hurriedly, peaceably. "But it's the most important single factor, and if there already are a couple of children in the family, and they seem to be in pretty good shape, it's the factor that the FPB considers to the exclusion of almost everything else in handing down its decision."

"Right!" Ed brought his hand down positively and the cards danced about on the portfolio-table. "Take my brother-in-law, Paul. Day and night, my wife is going *Paul this, Paul that;* it's no wonder I know more about him than I do myself. Paul owns half of Mars-Earth Freighting Syndicate, so he's in an eighteen-child bracket. His wife's sort of lazy, she doesn't care much for appear-ances, so they only have ten children, but—"

"Do they live in New Hampshire?" Frank asked. A moment before, Stewart Raley

had noticed Frank glanc-ing at him with real concern: he was evidently trying to change the subject, feeling that the direction the conversation had taken could only make Raley more miserable. It probably showed on his face.

He'd have to do something about his face: he'd be meet-ing Marian in a few minutes. If he wasn't careful, she'd guess immediately.

"New Hampshire?" Ed demanded contemptuously. "My brother-in-law, Paul? With *his* money? No, sir! No backyard suburb for him! He lives in the *real* country, west of Hudson Bay, up in Canada. But, like I was saying, he and his wife don't get along so good, the home life for the kids isn't the best in the world, if you know what I mean. You think they have trouble getting a 36A okayed? Not on your life! They fill it out and it's back the next morning with a big blue *approved* all over it. The way the FPB figures, what the hell, with their money they can afford to hire first-class nursemaids and child psychol-ogists, and if the kids still have trouble when *they* grow up, they'll get the best mental therapy that money can buy."

Bruce Robertson shook his head. "That doesn't sound right to me. After all, prospective parents are being turned down every day for negative heredity."

"Heredity is one thing," Ed pointed out. "Environ-ment's another. One can't be changed—the other can. And let me tell you, mister, the thing that makes the biggest change in the environment is money. M-O-N-E-Y: money, cash, gelt, moolah, wampum, the old spondulix. Enough money, and, the FPB figures *your* kid *has* to have a good start in life—especially with it supervising the early years. Your deal Stew. Hey, Stew! You in mourning for that last pot? You haven't said a word for the past fifteen minutes. Anything wrong? You didn't get fired today, did you?"

Raley tried to pull himself together. He picked up the cards. "No," he said thickly. "I didn't get fired."

Marian was waiting with the family jetabout at the landing field. Fortunately, she was too full of gossip to be very observant. She looked oddly at him only once, when he kissed her.

"That was a poor, tired thing," she said. "You used to do a lot better than that."

He dug his fingernails into his palms and tried to be whimsical. "That was before I was a poor, tired thing. Had a real hard day at the office. Be sweet and gentle with me, honey, and don't expect too much."

She nodded sympathetically and they climbed into the small craft. Lisa, twelve years old and their first child, was in the back seat with Mike, the latest. Lisa kissed her father resoundingly and then held up the baby for a simi-lar ceremony.

He found he had to force himself to kiss the baby.

They shot up into the air. All around them, the jeta-bouts radiated away from the landing field. Stewart Raley stared at the suburban roofs rushing by below and tried to decide when he was going to tell her. After supper, that would be a good time. No, better wait until the chil-dren were all in bed. Then, when he and Marian were alone in the living room—

He felt his stomach go solid and cold, just as it had that afternoon after lunch. Would he be able to bring himself to tell her at all, he wondered?

He had to. That was all there was to it. He had to—and tonight.

"—if I ever believed a word Sheila said in the first place," Marian was saying. "I told her: `Connie Tyler is not that sort of woman, and that's enough for me.' You

remember, darling, last month when Connie came to visit me in the hospital? Well, of course, I knew what she was thinking. She was looking at Mike and saying to herself that if Frank had only become head of the Ganymede department and had a two-thousand territ raise instead of you, *she'd* be having her fourth child now and I'd be visiting *her*. I knew what she was thinking, because in her place I'd be thinking exactly the same thing. But when she said it was the cutest, healthiest baby she'd ever seen, she was sincere. And when she wished me a fifth child for next year, she wasn't just being polite: she really meant it!"

*A fifth* child, Stewart Raley thought bitterly. *A fifth!*

"—so I leave it up to you. What should I do about Sheila if she comes around tomorrow and starts in all over again?"

"Sheila?" he asked stupidly. "Sheila?"

Marian shook her head impatiently over the controls. "Sheila Greene. Ed's wife, remember? Stewart, haven't you heard a word I said?"

"Sure, honey. About—uh, the hospital and Connie. And Mike. I heard everything you said. But where does Sheila come in?"

She turned around now and stared at him. The large green cat's-eyes, that had once pulled him across a dance floor to the side of a girl he didn't know, were very intent. Then she flipped a switch, letting the automatic pilot take over to keep them on course. "Something's wrong, Stewart. And it's not just a hard day at the office. Something's really wrong. What is it?"

"Later," he said. "I'll tell you later."

"No, now. Tell me now. I couldn't go through another second with you looking like that."

He blew out a chestful of breath and kept his eyes on the house-after-house-after-house beneath him.

"Jovian Chemicals bought the Keohula Mine today."

"So. What is that to you?"

"The Keohula Mine," he explained painfully, "is the only mine on Ganymede in full operation."

"I still—I'm afraid I still don't understand. Stewart, please tell me in words of one syllable, but tell me fast. What is it?"

He looked up, noticing how terrified she was. She had no idea what be was talking about, but she had always had remarkable instincts. Almost telepathic.

"With the Keohula Mine sold, and for a good price, Solar Minerals feels it is uneconomic to maintain an in-stallation on Ganymede. There are therefore shutting it down, effective immediately."

Marian raised her hands to her mouth in horror. "And that means—that means—"

"That means they no longer need a Ganymede Depart-ment. Or a Ganymede Department Chief."

"But they won't send you back to your old job!" she cried. "That would he too cruel! They couldn't demote you, Stewart, not after you've gone and had another child on the strength of your raise! There must be another department, there must be—"

"There isn't," he told her with a tongue that felt like cardboard. "They're shutting down operations on all the Jovian satellites. I'm not the only one affected. There's

Cartwright of the Europa desk and McKenzie of Io-—they both have seniority over me. From now on, Solar Minerals is going to lean heavily on its holdings on Ura-nus, Neptune and Pluto, and light everywhere else."

"Well, what about *those* planets? They'll need depart-ment heads at Solar Minerals, won't they?"

Raley sighed helplessly. "They have them. *And* assistant department heads. Good men who know their work, who've handled it for years. And as far as your next question goes, honey, I've spoken to Jovian Chemicals about a transfer. No go. They already have a Ganymede Department and the man handling it is very satisfactory. All day I kept trying one angle after another. But tomor-row, I'll be back in Ore Shipments."

"At your old salary?" she whispered. "Seven thousand territs a year?"

"Yes. Two thousand less than I'm getting now. Two thousand less than the minimum for four children."

Marian's hands crept up to her eyes, which filled, abruptly, with tears. "I'm not going to do it!" she sobbed. "I'm not! I'm not!"

"Honey," he said. "Honey-baby, it's the law. What can we do?"

"I absolutely—I absolutely refuse to decide which—which one of my children I'm going to—to give up!"

"I'll get promoted again. I'll be making nine thousand territs in no time. More, even. You'll see."

She stopped *crying* and stared at him dully. "But once a child is put up for adoption, the parents can't reclaim it. Even if their income increases. You know that, Stewart, as well as I. They can have other children, but they can't ever have the superfluous child back."

Of course he knew that. That regulation had been framed by the FPB to protect the foster-parents and encourage adoption into higher-bracket families. "We should have waited," he said. "Damn it, we should have waited!"

"We did," she reminded him. "We waited six months, to make certain your job was secure. Don't you remember the night that we had Mr. Halsey to dinner and he told us that you were working out *very* well and were definitely on your way up in the organization? `You'll have ten children yet, Mrs. Raley,' he said, `and my advice is to get started on them as soon as possible.' Those were his exact words."

"Poor Halsey. He couldn't meet my eyes all through the executive conference this afternoon. Just before I left the office, he came up and told me how sorry he was, how he'd look out for me in the very next promotion list. But he pointed out that practically everybody's re-trenching these days: it's been a bad year for extra-terrestrial products. And when I move back into my old job in Ore Shipments, I bump back the man who took my place. He moves down and bumps back somebody else. It's hell all around."

Marian dried her eyes with determined waves of the dashboard breezespout. *"Our* problem's enough for me, Stewart. I'm not interested in anybody else right now. What can we do?"

He leaned back and grimaced. "The best I could think of—I called my lawyer. Cleve said he'd be down this evening after dinner to go over the whole matter with us. If there's an out, Cleve will find it. He's handled a lot of FPB appeals."

She inclined her head in recognition of this effort. "That's a beginning. How much time do we have?"

"Well, I have to file a Notice of Superfluity form tomorrow morning. We have two weeks to decide which—which child."

Marian nodded again. They sat there, letting the auto-matic pilot throb the jetabout to its destination. After a while, Stewart Raley reached across the seat and took his wife's hand. Her fingers curled about his fingers spasmodically.

"I know which child," said a voice from behind them.

They both turned around sharply. "Lisa!" Marian gasped. "I forgot you were here! You've been listening!"

Lisa's round cheeks were glistening with wetness. "I've been listening," she admitted. "And I know which child it has to be. Me. I'm the oldest. I'm the one who should be put up for adoption. Not Penny or Susie or Mike, but me."

"Now you shush up, Lisa Raley. Your father and I will decide what to do. It's more than possible that nothing will happen. Nothing at all."

"I'm the oldest, so I should be put up for adoption. That's what my teacher says is supposed to happen. My teacher says that the young children are af-affected more than older children. And my teacher says that it's a very good thing, because you're sure to be adopted by a very rich family and you get more toys and better schools and and all sorts of things. My teacher says that maybe you're a little s-sad at first, but you have so many good things happening to you, that—that you get to be very ha-happy. And anyway, my teacher says, that's the way it has to be, 'cause that's the law."

Stewart Raley hit the seat hard. "That's enough! Your mother said she and I will decide."

"And besides," Lisa went on defiantly, wiping her face with one hand, "besides, I don't *want* to be a member of a three-child family. All my friends are four-child family girls. I'd have to go back to those poky old friends I used to have, and I—"

"Lisa!" Raley roared. "I'm still your father! Do you want me to prove it to you?"

Silence. Marian switched back to manual for the land-ing. She took the baby from the twelve-year-old and they all got out of the jetabout without looking at each other.

Raley took a moment before entering the house to adjust the handi-robot from "Gardening" to "Waiting on Tables." Then he followed the whirring metal figure through the door.

The trouble was that Lisa was right. All other things being equal, the oldest child was the usual choice for outside adoption. For her, it was a much less traumatic ex-perience. And the Family Planning Bureau would select the new parents carefully, from among the horde of ap-plicants, and see to it that the transfer was made as smooth-ly and happily as possible. Child psychologists would make twice-weekly visits for the first few years, insuring the maximum adjustment to the new situation.

Who would the new parents be? Probably someone like Ed Greene's brother-in-law, Paul, someone whose income had far outstripped the permissible family. That could be due to a variety of reasons: a lazy, unconventional wife, latent sterility in either partner to the marriage, a suddenly necessary hysterectomy. In any case, something that left them without the means of achieving the only kind of prestige that mattered.

You could have a real flossy jetabout—but you might have bought it on credit and still owe ten years' worth of salary on it. You might have an enormous home in expen-sive estate-filled Manitoba, where the top executives of the New York Business Area lived side by side with their opposite numbers from the Chicago and Los Angeles Busi-ness Areas, a home whose walls were paneled in rare Mar-tian woods and which was replete with every kind of specialized robot—but, for all anyone knew, you might be doing it by carrying a mortgage which was slowly but surely choking you into financial submission.

Children, now, children were definite. You couldn't have a child on credit, you didn't have a child because you were expecting business to get better. You only had a child when the FPB, having accepted you and your wife heredity-wise and environment-wise, decided your income was large enough to give that child all the advan-tages it deserved. Every child a family had represented a license that the FPB issued only after the most searching investigation. And *that* was status.

That was why you didn't have to give job data or ref-erences when you were buying something on time if you could pull out a six-child license. The clerk just took down your name and address and the serial number on the license—and that was that. You walked out of the store with the merchandise.

All through supper, Raley thought about that. He couldn't help feeling doubly guilty over his demotion in Solar Minerals when he remembered what his first thought was on the morning the license to have Mike ar-rived. It was a jubilant *now we get into the country club, now they'll invite us to join.* He'd been happy about the permission to have another baby, of course—he and Mar-ian both loved kids, and in quantity—but he'd already had three by then; it was the fourth child which was the big jump.

"Well," he said to himself, "and which father wouldn't have felt the same way? Even Marian, the day after Mike's birth, began calling him `our country-club son."

Those were happy, pride-filled days. They'd walked the Earth, Marian and he, like young monarchs on their way to coronation. Now—

Cleveland Boettiger, Raley's lawyer, arrived just as Marian was scolding Lisa into bed. The two men went into the living room and had the handi-robot mix them a drink.

"I won't sugar-coat it, Stew," the lawyer said, spread-ing the contents of his briefcase on the antique coffee-table that Marian had cleverly converted from an early twentieth-century army foot-locker. "It doesn't look good. I've been going over the latest FPB rulings and, in terms of your situation, it doesn't look good."

"Isn't there any chance? Any angle?"

"Well, that's what we'll try to find tonight."

Marian came in and curled up on the sofa next to her husband. "That Lisa!" she exclaimed. "I almost had to spank her. She's already beginning to look on me as a stranger with no authority over her. It's maddening."

"Lisa insists that she's the one who should be put up for adoption," Raley explained. "She heard us talking about it."

Boettiger picked up a sheet covered with notes and shook it out. "Lisa's right, of course. She's the oldest. Now, let's review the situation. You two married on a salary of three thousand territs a year, the minimum for one child. That's Lisa. Three years

later, accumulated raises brought your income up two thousand. That's Pe-nelope. Another year and a half, another two thousand. Susan. Last year, in February, you took over the Gany-mede desk at nine thousand a year. Mike. Today, you were demoted and went back to seven thousand, which is a maximum three-child bracket. Does that cover it?"

"That covers it," his host told him. *The story of my adult life,* he thought: *in a couple of sentences. It doesn't cover the miscarriage Marian almost had with Penny or the time the handi-robot short-circuited near the play-pen and we had to take six stitches in Susie's head. It doesn't cover the time—*

"All right, then, Stew, let's hit the income possibilities first. Do either of you have any hope of a sizable amount of money coming in soon, a legacy, say, or some piece of property that may substantially increase in value?"

They looked at each other. "Both Stewart's family and mine," Marian answered slowly, "are three- or four-child bracket people. There won't be much of an estate. And all we own, besides the house and the furniture and the jetabout, are some government bonds and a little Solar Minerals stock that won't be worth much more than we paid for it for a long, long time."

"That takes care of income. Let me ask you people this, then—"

"Wait a minute," Raley burst out. "Why does it take care of income? Suppose I get a part-time job, working weekends or evenings here in New Hampshire?"

"Because the license to have a child is predicated on the income from a normal thirty-hour week," the lawyer pointed out patiently. "If the father has to work addi-tional time in order to reach or maintain that income, his child sees that much less of him and, in the legal phrase, `is denied the normal prerogatives of a normal infancy.' Remember, the rights of the child are absolutely para-mount in present-day law. There's no way around it."

Stewart Raley stared at the opposite wall. "We could emigrate," he said in a low voice. "There are no birth-control regulations on Venus or any of the other colo-nies."

"You're thirty-eight, Marian is thirty-two. They like 'em young, real young, on Mars and Venus—not to men-tion the fact that you're an office worker, not a technician or a mechanic or farmer. I doubt very much that you could get a permanent extraterrestrial visa. No, the income possibilities are out. That leaves Special Hardship. Is there any claim you could think of under that head-ing?"

Marian saw a straw and clutched at it. "There might be something. I had to have a Caesarean when Mike was born."

"Um." Cleveland Boettiger reached for another docu-ment and studied it. "According to your medical data sheet, that was because of the child's position in the womb at birth. It is not expected to interfere in any way with future child-bearing. Anything else? Any negative psy-chological reports on Lisa, for example, that would make it inadvisable for her to transfer to another set of parents at this time? Think."

They thought. They sighed. There was nothing.

"Pretty much as I thought, then, Stew. It definitely doesn't look good. Well, suppose you sign this and hand it in with the Notice of Superfluity tomorrow. I've filled it out."

"What is it?" Marian asked, peering anxiously at the paper he had handed them.

"A Request for a Delay in Execution. The grounds I've given are that you were eminently satisfactory in your job and that therefore the demotion may be only temporary. It won't stand up once the FPB sends an in-vestigator to your main office, but that will take time. You'll get an extra month to decide which child and—who knows?—maybe something will turn up by then. A better job with another outfit, another promotion."

"I couldn't get a better job with another outfit these days," Raley said miserably. "I'm lucky to have the one I do, the way things are. And a promotion is out for at least a year."

There was a screech outside as a jetabout landed on their lawn.

"Company?" Marian wondered. "We weren't expect-ing anyone."

Her husband shook his head. *"Company!* The last thing in the world we want tonight is company. See who it is, Marian, and tell them please to go away."

She left the living room, waving to the handi-robot, as she went, to refill Boettiger's empty glass. Her face was stiff with pain.

"I don't see," Stewart Raley exclaimed, "why the FPB has to be that rigid and meticulous in interpreting the birth-control statutes! Can't they give a guy a little lee-way?"

"They do," the lawyer reminded him as he put the papers carefully back in the briefcase. "They certainly do. After the child has been approved and conceived, you're allowed a drop in income up to nine hundred territs-a concession to the unexpected. But two thousand, a whole two thousand . . ."

"It's unfair, though, it's damned unfair! After you have a child and raise it, for it to be taken away by a minor bureau of the world government is—"

"Now, Raley, don't be an ass!" Boettiger said sharply. "I'm your lawyer and I'll help you to the limits of my professional competence, but I won't sit here listening to you make noises that I know you don't believe yourself. Either family planning on a world-wide basis makes sense, or it doesn't. Either we make sure that each and every child is a wanted child, a valued child, with a solid chance for a decent, happy, fulfilled life, or we go back to the irresponsible, catch-as-catch-can childbearing methods of the previous centuries. We both know that intelligent family planning has made the world a far better place. Well, Form 36A is the symbol of family planning—and the Notice of Superfluity is just the reverse side of the coin. You cannot reasonably have one without the other."

Raley bowed his head and spread his hands. "I don't argue with that, Cleve. It's just—it's just—"

"It's just that the shoe happens to pinch you right now. I'm sorry for that, deeply sorry. But the way I feel is this: If a client comes to me and tells me he absent-mind-edly flew his jetabout over a restricted area, I'll use all my legal education and every inch of my dirty mind to get him off with as low a fine as possible. When he goes further, though, and starts telling me that the traffic regu-lations are no good—then I get impatient and tell him to shut up. And that's all the birth-control statutes are: a series of regulations to make the reproductive traffic of the human race flow more efficiently."

The voices from the entrance hall stopped abruptly. They heard Marian make a peculiar noise, halfway be-tween a squeal and a scream. Both men leaped to their

feet and ran through the archway to her.

She was in the foyer, standing beside Bruce Robertson. Her eyes were shut and she had one hand on the wall as if it alone kept her from falling.

"I'm sorry I upset her, Stew," the book illustrator said rapidly. His face was very pale. "You see, I want to adopt Lisa. Frank Tyler told me what happened today."

*"You?* You want to— But you're a bachelor!"

"Yes, but I'm in a five-child bracket income. I can adopt Lisa if I can prove that I can give her as good a home as a married couple might. Well, I can. All I want is for her last name to be changed legally to Robertson—I don't care what name she uses in school or with her friends—and she'll go on staying here, with me providing for her main-tenance. The FPB would consider that the best possible home."

Raley stared at Boettiger. The lawyer nodded. "It would. Besides that, if the natural parents express any wishes for a feasible adoptive situation, the weight of ad-ministrative action tends to be thrown in that direction. But what would you be getting out of that, young man?"

"I'd be getting a child—officially," Robertson told him. "I'd be getting a kid I could talk about, boast about, when other men boast about theirs. I'm sick and tired of being a no-child bachelor. I want to be *somebody."*

"But you might want to get married one day," Raley said, putting his arm about his wife, who had let a long breath out and turned to him. "You might want to get married and have children of your own."

"No, I wouldn't," Bruce Robertson said in a low voice. "Please don't pass this on, but there's amaurotic idiocy in my hereditary background. The only woman who'd ever marry me would be a sterile one. I doubt that I'll ever get married, but I certainly won't ever have kids. This—this is my only chance."

"Oh, darling," Marian sobbed happily in Raley's arms. "It will work. It really will work!"

"All I ask," the book illustrator went on uncertainly, "is the privilege of coming here once in a while, to kind of see Lisa and see what's going on with her."

"Once in a while!" Raley roared. "You can come every night. After all, you'll be like a member of the family. *Like* a member of the family? You'll *be* a member of the family; man, you'll *be* the family!"