Emile Jeger trembled in anticipation, her stress-lined brow drenched in sweat. It had taken several years to achieve maternity approval, but today she'd finally get to choose genetic options for the perfect baby. "Mrs. Jeger," a metallic voice echoed.

"Yes," she answered. "I'm here."

"Of course," the voice responded. A small, illuminated box pivoted toward her from a centralized column, echoing from its plexi-formed speaker. "The Genist will see you now. Please enter through the sliding panel to your left."

As she entered the corridor, the door slid closed behind her, releasing a thick blue mist into the previously occupied reception area. Above it, message screens confirmed its decontamination relay. The hall beyond reception ended with a circular panel extending from the floor. Once weighted, the decension disk slipped several meters below ground floor to a second corridor, which opened into a small domed cell.

"Mrs. Jeger, thank you for your application," The lights dimmed, as small images filled the ceiling above. "Here at Gen-True, we strive to create perfect children for our customers, each completely devoid of bioflaw to the consumer's unique specifications. Your ovum and sample of your husband's genetic material have been reviewed, and we're delighted to present the following results:"

Several pictures of children flashed against the concave screen with an animated double-helix beside each. "These are your possibilities. A centralized trade assignment, behavioral modification suggestions, and general specifications for basic analysis possibilities accent each child. In the event that none are deemed suitable, genetic donors are available at an additional cost. Please be seated, Mrs. Jeger."

Carefully, she perched on the edge of a simple metal platform and gazed at the images above her. "Let's start with number 60105."

"Number 60105: female. blonde hair, blue eyes, 5' 8 at maturity, artistic qualities. Classification: Aestheticist. Schools requesting this child: Miramond, Kapplan, Bogessch. Behavior problems: Tendency to daydream, minimum personality, minor challengers syndrome. Suggestion: Program code 49S87. More options available. Continue?"

"No, thank you. How about number 78452?"

"Number 78452: male. Blonde hair, green eyes, 6'4 at maturity . . ." The reading was interrupted by an intermittent beeping sound. "Mrs. Jeger, please remain calm. Lie back for a moment and relax. A genetist will be with you momentarily."

"What's happening?" Her heart race in overwhelming panic as fumes filtered in from vents near the ceiling. The warm vapor clung in her throat. "No!" she struggled to prevent breathing the gas.

"Mrs. Jeger, be reasonable. The solution won't harm you. It's heavier than the air you typically breathe, so you might be able to feel it enter your lungs."

Her eyes closed. "no," she softly murmured again, as her body weighted down.

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George Minersly marveled at the image of a woman lying motionlessly in conference room seven. "Are you sure? That's fabulous. How many was it again?"

"Nearly forty uniques. We almost didn't catch it. Her selection triggered an internal alarm." A slender, dark-haired gentleman clicked excitedly at his terminal. "It's almost record."

"Who dropped the ball on that one? That's inexcusable," George continued. "If it'd been me, they'd have me scraping gedron particles off sewer manifolds."

"Actually, they think her husband tampered with premarriage screening results. Poor fool. I wonder how he knew. I'll bet he didn't know she was trying to get a maternity license, though. She should've been sent years ago. It'll be easy to correct though. I'm already on it."

"So the husband's not a carrier? Not at all? Can't be placed together?"

"Nope. She's an originator. I re-screened to make sure. There were thirty-seven tendencies in the 100 sample. This one's probably worth around 60 gard."

"Sixty? Wow. Why didn't that idiot turn her in himself? He'd be rich enough to buy the perfect match and have luxury gard to spare."

"His parents must be from the old mind set. Mine opted out of the emotional option in exchange for ambition. Lucky me. Of course, the fools couldn't figure out why I sent them to Karbers when they reached silver. By then they wished for more emotional valuation."

"Mine selected compassion, but sometimes my wallet longs for more amby quals and less emo."

"Well, he's gonna regret not cashing in. Wonder what triggered her carrier tendencies. Some Genists were careless, especially the older ones. Good thing, too. Pays our bills. Think she'll adapt?"

"Dunno. Sometimes they can't cope with change. There's residuals, mem parc's, seches. . . "

"Would you rather the vios stay here? There's only a few mirots before that colony destroys itself, and we clean it for hospitality. I hate diplomatic waiting periods though."

"I can't wait! Space, air, and no more water rationing!"

"Do you ever feel sorry for them? The ones we find during the licensing process?"

"Why?"

"She spent years waiting. Now, she's just another statistic."

"Don't feel sorry for her. Maternity's free down there. When her neuro's rerouted, she'll implant, and the offspring will help contribute to the end. That's how things work. We find 'em, send 'em, and set 'em up, and they breed while we wait."

"What if something goes wrong? What about peacefuls like Ghandi or John Lennon? We'd lose our jobs."

"Examples of flukes. She's got almost a forty percent chance of contributing a problem to that already violent and doomed society. Careful screening keeps our society from harboring violence. Crime is nearly nonexistent. Once that ridiculous planet destructs, cleanup and then occupation. Don't worry about peacemakers"

"Why don't we just obliterate and take it."

"MLI would never allow that."

"What about helping the process along?"

"Treaty forbids implantation of technology. You can sneak it in through accidental discovery, but since 1973, things are watched too closely. Don't worry though. Another war is expected at any time. Let's get her down to processing. I've gotta get home."

"Me too. Janey thinks I spend too much time at work. Glad she never wanted kids."

"Compassion flaw?"

"Have you seen the cost of Genmatch these days? I can't afford to respouse."