

Freedom Beyond Dignity

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She was a bit apprehensive as she walked toward the desk. The receptionist smiled automatically and asked Mrs. Redgate how long she had been pregnant.

"Just under eleven weeks, I think."

"Good. You just made our deadline. The government said within three months after the last menstrual flow."

"Is it painful?"

"No more than any other needle prick. You've given blood before? Just a needle prick through the belly."

Mrs. Redgate had wondered what "A.B.C." meant. The letters glared through the clinic window. She had also seen them on the letter from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

"Amniocentesis for Better Children."

"Oh. The letter said that I didn't have to come, but it would be to my benefit?"

"Yes. You see, should your fetus be deformed, or have any genetic defect, we will recommend that you abort it. If you refuse, the Court has ruled that no agency can help you."

"But what if I want to have the baby anyway?"

"We just couldn't help you. You couldn't get insurance or social aid. If you can afford the costs, that's up to you."

"But I read where some people had a baby that cost them \$20,000 a year."

"Most people can't afford that, of course. That's why President Armstrong suggested that social agencies refuse to support babies found to be

defective before birth. Then when the major group insurance companies backed him up, most states heeded his advice. Then the Court ruled that it was unconstitutional for people to be forced to pay for the support of someone else's baby. I know it's scary, but in a democracy people should be free to choose. And if they choose not to support the defectives of other parents, it's their right not to do so."

"But what about my rights? Don't I have a right to have a baby if I want it?"

"Of course you do. But your rights mustn't interfere with the rights of others. If you don't have the amniocentesis done and you should have a deviate, then you must support it yourself."

"Deviate?"

"Someone who's off the normalcy curve."

"But what's normal?"

"Right now, it's nearly perfect health."

"What about school? Will the schools take him?"

"Not the public schools. It's unconstitutional to force normal kids to slow down."

"But what about special schools?"

"Again, it's not fair for the parents of normal children to be forced to pay for schools for the abnormal. Mrs. Redgate, you're missing the point. You see, medicine has moved forward. We all want people to be healthy, and we can almost guarantee that you will have only normal babies. Some things can go wrong, but if you submit to A.B.C. and we notarize the fetus as normal, you are

cleared. If it is born with a defect that went unnoticed, the state will take care of your expenses. But only if it's been cleared under our quality control program."

"I thought that abortion was allowed so that people would have as much choice as they wanted. Didn't the Court rule that abortion was a person's choice, and that was the whole idea behind the movement in the 1970's?"

"Yes, as I recall. But I think I read somewhere that some guys in Public Health began to carry out cost-benefit studies on the expenses related to some defects, and found that they'd save a lot of money if they could use abortion and amniocentesis together to eliminate all the deviates. At first, most people went along. But then some people began to object, and that's when Armstrong made his plea."

"Well anyway, I don't have much choice have I?"

"I'm afraid not. Now, your husband's name?"

"He's deceased. Two years ago. They froze his sperm when he had his vasectomy. And about six months ago, I got kinda lonely, and wanted a child. His child. It took three months. Three tries."

"Artificial insemination?"

"Yes. But then the Court made that decision. If I'd known, I guess I wouldn't have gone through with it."

"Listen. The government has always tried to do what's best for society as a whole. And if sometimes that seems to interfere with a person's freedom, we've got to remember that stop signs, food laws, quar-

antine laws, vaccination laws, all prevent people from endangering the survival of our social structure. For example, in 1972 when some states began to do routine blood tests on most newborn infants, no one complained. They didn't complain because whenever a baby was found to have something wrong, they'd try to cure it. But you see, this unknowingly set up the machinery to make it easy to check everyone born for nearly everything. And when kids entered school, their record included their genetic profile. That was by 1979. Then a couple of years ago, someone decided that two carriers of a bad gene couldn't marry each other. Then finally, we've come to my own job here. We check fetuses and abort the deviates. In the last 35 years, since 1950, we've gotten rid of polio, German measles, Rh incompatibility, Tay-Sach's disease, sickle cell anemia, cystic fibrosis, and we've got only a few mongoloids left. Is that wrong?"

"I guess not. But I still feel that my freedom's being checked. Next thing they'll tell us is that we'll be killed at 75."

"Come on now, you're being emotional. When the Court ruled that a person may die whenever he wants, that didn't mean that he would be forced to die. It's a private decision between a person and his doctor. As long as the patient can support himself and pay for the hospital and doctor, he can stay alive as long as he wants. Trouble is, a lot of people always jump the gun. As soon as a thing is made available, they think it'll lead to something else. There's no evidence for that at all."

"But what happens now to those of us who don't want to die? Ain't a lot of nursing homes left, you know?"

"Like I said. You'll have to support yourself, of course. It's unconstitutional for the producers to support the consumers."

"Anyway. About this test. Can you tell if it's a boy or a girl?"

"Yes. But didn't the bank tell you what kind of sperm they were using?"

"They said they preferred to mix 'em all up after the man dies. Leaves something to chance, and they also said something about sex ratios or something."

"I guess they know what they're doing. I must hurry now. You're our twelfth lady today. I'll be glad when we get our order."

"Order?"

"We've been trying to get the self-test kit for our patients. But they're in short supply. Shipment to Russia or something. It'll be done at home."

"What's in it? You mean I'd prick my own belly?"

"Of course not. No. You see, the kit contains three pills. About 48 hours after making love. . ."

"Used to be people fell in love. Now they make love?"

"Words hide well."

"How can you 'make' love?"

"I thought you were married."

"No, I mean, love is something you can't make. Why don't they use the right words?"

"Anyway, after 48 hours, whether you 'made love' or whatever, after an insemination too, the first pill will tell you if a conception has occurred. You just drop it into your urine. Then if it turns blue, you take the next pill orally ten days later. That pill reacts to the presence of some 130 genes, bad genes, in the embryo. If your urine comes out purple, you have a deviate. Then you would take the third pill; it's called a 'detacher.' A refinement of the chemicals they used to take in about 1976 for mid-trimester abortions. And the embryo is aborted before you even miss a period."

"Will it be expensive?"

"Free. The government wants the people to be as free as possible to choose."

"I guess they know what they're doing."

"I think so, Mrs. Redgate. Listen to this. It's a little thing that I read recently. A fellow by the name of Joseph Fletcher wrote it. He said: 'It is cruel and insane to deprive normal but disadvantaged children of the care we could give them with the

\$1,500,000,000 we spend in public costs for preventable retardates!"

Mrs. Redgate pulled out a small and rather dirty piece of paper from her purse. "Now that's a coincidence. I've always carried this with me. My father gave it to me, and I never want to forget it. It sounds a lot like what you just read. Listen. 'It is the supreme duty of the national State to grant life and livelihood only to the healthy.'"

"Who wrote it?"

"Says here: 'Dr. Arthur Guett, Nazi Director of Public Health, 1935.'"

Research

The ability to investigate systematically and truly all that comes under your observation in life.

Marcus Aurelius

Scientific activity dedicated to discovering what makes grass green.

Russell Baker

To give each and every element its final value by grouping them in the unity of an organized whole.

Pierre T. de Chardin

Not to find truth but to investigate and search after it.

Max Nordau

In all men, thought and action start from a single source, namely, feeling.

Epictetus

Two kinds: the kind that fill you with so much quail shot that you can't move, and the kind that just give you a little prod behind and you jump to the skies.

Robert Frost

The vanity of teaching often tempts a man to forget he is a blockhead.

Lord Halifax