

XX

A Novel

By William Bowles

Copyright © 2004, William Bowles. All rights reserved.

With a nod to Steve Jones who, in part, inspired this story

Installment 8

That night my dream returned, only now my baby was in my arms and she was using her tiny fingers to trace the contours of my face and now, she was talking to me. ‘Mummy,’ she said, quite clearly, and repeated the word over and over with that broad, wise smile playing across her face. I returned her smile, and lent forward and kissed her, to her obvious great delight. I felt peaceful and utterly contented and hugging her to me, closed my eyes, feeling her tiny heart beating against my breast, and slept. When I woke up, I was able to replay it like a movie, over and over again. I had that feeling again, although there was nothing to justify it, that her act was one of reassurance, that everything would be all right. And although the vision didn’t scare me like it had before, I still had a sense of unease, a feeling that I was dealing with something way beyond my understanding. And the more I thought about it, the more the feeling of unease rose in my gut, if only because it defied all reason, even though all my experience kept telling me it was only a dream. Yet how come it didn't feel like a dream? Could a three month old fetus really communicate with me and if so, how? Telepathy was just science fiction and everything I believe in rejected the idea completely. Yet in the light of what had happened to me, who was I to challenge the notion of my baby communicating with me from my womb?

I got up and went into the bathroom and stared at my face in the mirror as if searching for some sign of her. Ridiculous! What was I doing? I shook myself mentally, ran a bath and soaked in it for ages, stroking my slightly swollen tummy and thinking about the life developing within and what surprises she had in store for me. As I lay there, I could hear movement downstairs and the smell of bacon frying and voices talking quietly. I felt the same peace and contentment as I had in the dream. I must have dozed off as the water had cooled down and I felt a chill, forcing me to get out of the bath and quickly dress.

I sat at my dressing table and brushed my hair this way and that, trying to get it to look halfway decent, feeling irritated with what a mess it was, and cursing myself for not having got it cut, vowing that as soon as I could, I would pay a visit to a hairdresser. Unable to get it under any kind of control, I experimented with wrapping it in a scarf that Judy had given me, but no matter what I did, I was unhappy with the result and finally gave up. This new found sense of interest in my appearance was somehow not surprising, I think because it reflected a growing acceptance of my new life, or perhaps it was because I wanted to look my best when I joined everybody in the kitchen? A stray thought about Matthew flashed across my consciousness, which I quickly suppressed feeling embarrassed that it had surfaced at all. I didn’t even find him that interesting! I hunted through my meager collection of clothes trying

to find something to wear but nothing appealed to me. I ended up wearing the silk skirt I'd worn before and a lilac roll neck jumper and boring flats. They'd have to do.

I had coffee, juice and toast for breakfast. Then Judy suggested a morning stroll. Morning? It was almost noon. Clare and Matthew declined, so after changing into something warm, we set out. It was crisp and still outside, with virtually no clouds in the sky, a perfect day for a walk. In a way, I was glad it was just the two of us, I had the feeling we had a lot to talk about. We strolled down the lane, taking what had become our normal route, pretty much in silence for the first fifteen minutes or so. Rooks circled the trees and birds pecked at seeds and insects in the plowed fields.

Eventually, Judy said, 'So, what do you think of my friends?'

'I like them both. At first I have to admit it was a bit of a strain for me but I'm glad they're here and I actually enjoyed the conversation yesterday afternoon even though it did tire me out.'

'Are you sure? I thought Clare was a bit intrusive and provocative.'

'No, not really. I think had I been in her shoes I would have felt the same way, you know, curious and skeptical. An entirely natural reaction.'

'And Matthew?'

'Yes well, I think Matthew felt more uncomfortable in my presence, less sure of how to deal with me. It's that man woman thing.'

'I think he fancies you but is embarrassed by the fact.'

'Do you really? Funny that because that's what I thought.'

'And you?'

'Me? Oh do you mean do I fancy him? No way, I'm not attracted to him in the least.'

She had a skeptical look on her face.

'No really! I don't, honestly,' but she didn't look convinced and I didn't know what else I could say to convince her so I tried to change the subject.

'I had the dream again last night, only it was different this time,' and I tried to tell her about it and what I'd felt, but it just didn't come out right, especially the telepathy angle. But she was intent on pursuing the Matthew thing.

'It's okay for you to like him you know.'

'Well I do like him but not, you know, fancy him, as you put it. And in any case, the last thing I need now is a boyfriend for Christ's sake.'

Apparently convinced by my insistence, she put her arm through mine in a gesture of reconciliation.

‘I’m sorry Nova, I’m being silly aren’t I.’

The intimacy of her remark struck me and I felt really close to her, arm in arm like we were sisters, strolling leisurely down the lane together. I felt secure and safe with her and for a brief moment, I had a flash of what? Desire?

‘No, you’re not being silly, just a little insecure perhaps?’

‘Yes, you’re right, it was just the way he looked at you when you came into the kitchen in that beautiful gown.’

‘I don’t think he could help himself Judy. Isn’t that the point of them? But I’ll tell you one thing it taught me, and that’s just how predictable men are. It’s just a question of pushing the right buttons once you know which the right ones are.’

Judy looked at me with wide eyes.

‘Well, it didn’t take you long did it.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Oh Nova don’t play coy with me. Flexing your feminine muscles.’

‘Is that why I wore it I wonder? You may be right you know. I’m finding it very difficult to be unselfconscious. It’s like I have to relearn all of my social skills, to look at the world from the opposite side. But I still don’t fancy him.’

‘Well it’s my fault, I persuaded you to buy the damn thing in the first place.’

‘And I’m glad you did, it unlocked a whole new set of feelings for me. And you know, this morning, I couldn’t find anything I wanted to wear, not that I have much to start with.’

‘That’s great Nova. I’m really pleased. Perhaps you’ll soon be able to get on with a normal life, well as normal as possible under the circumstances.’

‘Are you fed up with me being here, invading your privacy?’

‘What made you say that? Oh I see. No silly, that’s not why I said it. I admit in the beginning, I was a little resentful of the invasion of my cosy, private life, but not now. When, if, you do leave, I’ll miss you, I really will. But I hope you’ll be around when you have your baby.’

‘That’s six months away! A lot of things could happen between now and then.’

‘Like what? Look, you’re going to need someone, and I’d be really pleased if it’s me.’

‘Really? Well I like your company too Judy.’

A wave of intense intimacy passed between us, which unnerved us both I think, before receding into a silence that took us down the lane for quite a while before either of us felt comfortable talking again.

‘These dreams Nova. They really bother you don’t they.’

‘Yes. I’ve never had dreams like this before. Not with the kind of intensity and feeling of reality that these have. You know dreams always have something illogical in them, something that doesn’t fit, like flying. Do you know what I mean? Something that couldn’t exist in the real world, an inconsistency, but these don’t. Like I said, they’re like a movie, a communication, well that’s how they feel anyway. But my experience tells me its impossible, so I’m just left with a disturbing feeling that won’t go away. They have to be connected to my transformation in some way, it’s too much of a coincidence don’t you think?’

‘Well there could be other explanations surely. After all the stress you’ve been through, it’s not surprising you’re having such vivid dreams. Maybe it’s a way of coming to terms with being pregnant?’

‘Yes, that’s what I keep telling myself too. But the baby, talking to me?’

‘I think you’re making too much of it really I do. Maybe you want to believe she’s talking to you, hasn’t that occurred to you?’

‘Maybe you’re right.’ But I know I hadn’t convinced Judy and I surely hadn’t convinced myself.

When we got back to the cottage, Clare and Matthew had been busy. The table was laid and food was about to be dished up.

‘Perfect timing girls,’ as Clare ushered us to our seats.

I stuffed my face, the walk had worked up a real appetite and afterwards, I fell asleep in front of the fire.

‘Mummy.’ I woke up and baby was stroking my face. ‘Mummy.’ She leaned forward, and still smiling, kissed me, very delicately on the cheek. It sent shivers up my spine. ‘Hello darling, I’m here, it’s okay. I was just sleeping,’ I said and kissed her back. I woke with a start to find Clare and Judy standing over me, wide eyed.

‘Are you all right?’

‘Yeah, why? What happened?’ I was still a bit drowsy. It was warm in front of the fire that had burned down to glowing, red-hot embers.

‘You were talking in your sleep.’

‘What did I say?’

‘Well,’ they looked at each other. ‘You said, ‘Hello darling, I’m here, it’s okay. I was just sleeping’, in a very quiet, soothing voice.’

‘Jesus, that’s exactly what I said in the dream to baby. She woke me up. She was stroking my face and then she kissed me, so I was reassuring her I suppose. Then I kissed her back, and then I woke up.’

I was trembling. It suddenly occurred to me whether the others were having the same kind of dream. I had to find out. Maybe Doctor Friedland would know. Then I remembered he'd given me his card. Where had I put it?

'I have to speak to Doctor Friedland.'

'What now?'

'Yes,' as I rushed upstairs to my room and searched through my things, found the card, went back downstairs and dialed the number.

'Hello, Doctor Friedland?' 'It's Nova, Nova Simmons.' 'Yes, I'm okay and you?' 'Yeah, I'm having a nice Christmas thanks, and you?' 'Look, sorry to bother you over the Christmas but I need some information.' 'It's about my dreams. I need to know whether the others are also having the same dreams. It's very important.' 'Well I'm having extremely vivid dreams about my baby and thought you might have some information on the others, or at least, well maybe if I could talk to some of them, even one of them?' 'I see. Well do you have Janet MacGregor's number?' 'Okay, thanks, but could you get back to me with it please if you can, it's very important.' 'Okay, thank you.' I gave him Judy's number. 'Bye.'

I sank back into the chair in front of the fire.

'Want to talk about it?' Clare pulled her chair closer to mine.

As I sat there considering Clare's offer, I realised that I was rubbing my tummy as if caressing the life within.

'There's something very special about her, I'm sure about that. How my dreams connect to that feeling, I just don't know.'

'Perhaps it's because it's a virgin, is that right word? Conception?'

'Possibly. Yes, you maybe right. It never occurred to me that it could be linked in that way.'

'What if you find out that the others are having identical or similar dreams?'

'Well that would change everything wouldn't it. It would mean that there is something fundamentally different about my baby and her connection to me.'

'Like what?'

'Frankly, it scares me to think about it.'

'Why are you scared of the idea that your baby could be, well different?'

'I'm scared for her. What could happen to her. And of course I'm frightened that she may be...' I couldn't get the words out.

'That she could be a freak?'

'Yes, that but perhaps worse than that even.'

‘You mean killed?’

I nodded.

‘Don’t you think you’re being a little melodramatic?’

‘Well if we’re to believe the press reports, we’re already being murdered. Can you imagine what could happen to our children.’

‘You speak as if you already think of yourself as well...’ She trailed off, obviously not wanting to voice her thought.

‘Not human?’

‘Yesterday, you called it the third sex.’

‘Yes, the third sex.’

‘What do the doctors and scientists think?’

‘I don’t know. I’ve not asked them and they’ve not volunteered to tell me anything.’

‘But surely you must be curious?’

‘I suppose I don’t trust them. Not that they wouldn’t try to uncover the truth but I’m suspicious of their motives. Afraid of becoming a circus freak, maybe? It’s also got to do with how I reacted to my being pregnant. Judy can tell you. As the reality finally took over my consciousness, it seemed enough. It didn’t matter how or why, it just was.’

‘And being a woman?’

‘Yes. In the beginning I just totally rejected the idea. It may sound strange, but I was more comfortable with being pregnant than being female.’

‘I don’t think it’s strange. After all, being pregnant is something internal, private almost. Being female means being on display, unless of course you try to disguise yourself.’

‘Which I did, or tried to do. It seems ridiculous now but back then, in the beginning, I couldn’t even bring myself to try on a bra or panties. I went through hell just going into a clothing store and looking. Yes of course it was denial. But look what happened yesterday when I wore my beautiful nightgown.’

Clare looked a little embarrassed.

‘Yes, I see what you mean but that may be because of Matthew’s presence?’

‘Possibly.’

‘But if it’s not too close to the bone, you seem very worried about whether or not your baby will be normal. By normal, I mean not disabled or borne with defects.’

‘Of course I am!’

‘I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to upset you.’

I could feel tears forming. Judy took hold of my hand.

‘Clare!’ Judy glared at her.

‘I’m awfully sorry, really I am. I didn’t mean...’

‘No, it’s all right. I have to face that possibility even though Victoria, that’s my doctor, has done all kinds of tests and says she can’t find anything wrong, so maybe I’m being over sensitive, paranoid even.’

Clare, looking very contrite, subsided into silence.

Then Matthew came into the room, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes.

‘What are you girls up to?’

‘Did we wake you?’

‘No not really.’ I didn’t believe him though. Then noticing the look on my face said, ‘Are you okay Nova? Has Clare been upsetting you?’

What was going on here? I could see an argument brewing and so could Judy.

‘Matthew, please, shut up. Everything’s okay.’

Clare said nothing and near to tears, left the room. I got up to go to her but Judy waved me to stay. ‘I’ll talk to her later.’

Matthew, obviously in an effort to take his foot out of his mouth, offered to make tea, which Judy accepted.

‘I had no idea.’

‘That I’d have this kind of effect?’

‘Something like that.’

We sat in silence for awhile, and then Judy stoked up the fire and put some more logs on and said to me, ‘Are you feeling cold ‘cos I am.’ She wrapped a shawl around her shoulders and hunched over, leaning close to the fire.

‘No, I’m fine.’

Then Matthew came in with the tray of tea and set it down on the table. ‘Shall I be mother?’

‘Yes, why don’t you try it Matthew.’ Judy’s sarcasm wasn’t lost on him.

‘I’m terribly sorry. I don’t know why I said it. I feel such a fool. It just popped out. I’ll have to apologise to her.’

‘Just leave her be Matthew. Pour the tea.’

We sat around the fire glumly drinking tea. I heard steps on the stairs and Clare entered with a sheepish grin.

‘Behaving like a silly school girl. Don’t know what came over me.’

I felt compelled to say something. After all, I was the cause of it.

‘I think we need to clear the air and as I seem to be the catalyst, I think it’s up to me to...’

‘No it’s not. If I hadn’t subjected you to my, insensitive interrogation, none of this would have happened.’

‘Perhaps,’ ventured Judy, ‘perhaps we’re all ill equipped to deal with this situation. The dynamics of it are, well to put it mildly, unique. I think it demonstrates just how complex relations are between the sexes, especially when,’ she searched for the words, ‘especially when we’re confused, I suppose that’s right word, about exactly who Nova is.’

‘Ah Judy, forever the peacemaker.’

‘Well I do feel responsible.’

‘I really don’t think we need to apologise to each other. And as I was about to say, I think to a great degree, if there is any responsibility, it has to be mine for any confusion over who, or is it what, I am.’

‘Don’t be ridiculous Nova. We’re all confused.’

I laughed nervously. ‘Well I’m glad we’ve sorted that out.’ And my laughter caught on, breaking the tension.

‘The battle of the sexes, only now we have three instead of two.’

‘Very witty Matthew.’

Feeling somewhat vindicated Matthew relaxed and gave us all a nervous smile, as if to say, thank you for letting me back into the cabal of women. Poor Matthew, I felt sorry for him, he was completely out of his depth. We sat around for a while, then feeling completely drained I made my goodnights and went to bed and the dream. I actually looked forward to it somehow it was comforting.

15

They left the following morning, with promises of staying in touch and not to tell anyone where I was staying or even talking about me to anyone. After they left, we retired to the kitchen and contemplated clearing up the mess but didn’t get very far. It was obvious Judy was immensely relieved that they’d gone but I felt really guilty, because if it hadn’t been for me, Judy would have had a relaxing and enjoyable Christmas.

‘Oh stop apologising Nova, please. So it wasn’t a Christmas card Christmas, so what? You’re my dear friend and I care about you deeply. Moreover, I learned things about my friends that I didn’t know, and especially about Matthew. Nice though he is, he’s not got a very good grasp of things.’

‘You mean he’s a bit dense?’

‘Well I wouldn’t have put quite so cruelly, but yes.’

‘And Clare?’

‘Ruthless and stubborn once she gets stuck into something.’

‘Or someone.’

‘Yes. But I like her and I think, in spite of appearances she really liked you. She’s smart and actually quite likeable but like a lot of women I know, guilty about being a smart woman, especially around men. I think she was genuinely confused by you. Always trying to figure out whether it was a man or a woman speaking and finally realising that perhaps it was neither?’

‘Or both. I never asked her what she does.’

‘Well it probably won’t surprise you that’s she’s an industrial psychologist and quite a good one apparently.’

‘And Matthew?’

‘He works for an investment firm.’

‘That might explain things.’

‘Oh I forgot, you’re old time socialist.’

‘In a new times body.’

‘You know, I’m glad it’s just the two of us again.’

‘So am I.’

It was another one of those strange exchanges between us. Was Judy gay I wondered? Was I? I had the feeling that Judy was thinking the same thing but neither of us took the thought any further. We started on cleaning up the cottage but our hearts weren’t really into it. I suggested we go for a walk instead, so we washed and dressed. Judy suggested we took a different route this time.

‘You know I really enjoy these walks, it’s so peaceful out here, I forget everything else. It would be very easy never to leave.’

‘You don’t have to you know.’

‘Judy?’

‘What?’

‘Well, I’m confused.’

‘It’s about what you feel for me isn’t it? Or at least, what you think the feeling is.’

‘Yes, you’re right. I know I’m not sexually attracted to you at all. It’s something else only there’s no word to describe it that I can think of. Amongst men, it would probably be called comradeship, but that doesn’t really come near to describing the feeling.’

‘Sisterhood?’

‘Perhaps...yes, sisterhood.’

As I repeated the word, I felt an enormous load lift from my shoulders, as if naming it somehow brought it under control. I was no longer afraid of it.

‘Yes, it’s a feeling most, if not all, men have no comprehension of perhaps because it can be so physical, so close but not be sexual. Sensual maybe, but definitely not sexual.’

‘That’s brilliant Judy.’

‘Well I’m sure it’s not original.’

‘No really, it makes sense.’ I was excited now. ‘It explains so many things, things I feel about myself and what I’ve been through, especially of inhabiting a different physical space. How I relate to the world around me, to my body, to other women.’

‘You’ve mentioned this before.’

‘Yes. It’s an odd feeling because it’s so difficult to define. It’s like asking someone who’s a native English speaker to tell you what English sounds like.’

‘Or how can a woman tell a man what it feels like to be a woman?’

‘Precisely.’

‘God, it’s like peeling an onion.’

‘Feel better now?’

‘Much better. And thank you.’

‘For what?’

‘For being so perceptive. I’m know I could never have done this with a man.’

‘I get the feeling you don’t really like men do you. Did you like being a man, before?’

The question shocked me. I had to think before I answered. Did I?

‘If I said no, it might be for the wrong reason.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Well it could be that I didn’t like myself.’

‘That implies that you do now.’

‘Do you think I’m being evasive?’

‘Possibly.’

‘Well in a way, I’ve had a second chance at life, like being able to take a different turning at a crossroads. It’s made me reconsider things. But there’s no precedent is there. But I’m sure I’ve got a different mind than the one I had, but of course how would you know, you didn’t know me as man.’

‘Okay, that’s a reasonable response. But what about not liking men?’

‘Yes, I think you’re right there. I’ve always preferred women. No, that’s not true. Let me rephrase that. I don’t like what men do or how they behave, and I have to include myself in that obviously. Perhaps we’re trapped by evolution, where biology and consciousness collide.’

‘You really come up with them don’t you.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Don’t be so modest Nova. Oh you, you’re blushing.’

‘It’s the cold.’

Back at the house, we put together a late lunch, or early supper and sat in front of the fire and polished off a bottle of wine, with Judy reminding me once again that baby didn’t like alcohol.

‘Don’t be a nanny.’

‘Nova.’

Sleep, and the dream of course.

The following day Doctor Friedland phoned with Janet MacGregor’s number and that she was expecting my call. He tried to get me to talk about how I was feeling, but I put him off with a promise that we’d talk the next time I came to the hospital. I was trembling as I dialed. Judy sat there almost as anxious as I was.

‘Janet?’ ‘It’s Nova, can you talk?’ ‘Listen, I need to know whether you have dreams?’ ‘Well specifically about your baby.’ ‘Really?’ ‘Do you have them often?’ ‘What are they like, I mean do they feel like, well ordinary dreams?’ ‘Well, do they seem especially realistic, not like normal dreams?’ ‘Can you tell me what happens?’ ‘Well I have them too and wanted to know if it’s just me, or all of us.’ ‘Who’ve been through the change.’ ‘I’m sorry if it upsets you but it’s really important.’ ‘Well perhaps I can phone you back or you could phone me, I’ll give you my number.’

‘She hung up. I think her mother came into the room.’

‘Well don’t keep me in suspense!’

‘Yes, she has them even though she wouldn’t tell me what they were about, it was obvious. Just the fact that it upset her to talk about them.’

‘So, where does that leave us?’

‘I’ve no idea. But my guess was right and I bet all the others have them too just as I suspected.’

‘So you really think your baby is, I don’t know, talking to you?’

‘What else could it be? But I wish I could have gotten more detail from her. It’s her bloody mother!’

‘Well it could still be a symptom rather than some kind of, I don’t know what you would call it?’

‘Supernatural?’

‘Yes, I suppose so.’

‘You may be right. But it needn’t be supernatural, I can think of at least one way it could happen.’

‘Like how?’

‘Through the bloodstream for example. Chemical messages from her brain to mine via my nervous system and possibly from my brain to hers.’

‘That’s fantastic.’

‘Yes, isn’t it. In fact the more I think about it, it strikes me that it’s more likely that I’m communicating with her, feeding her the thoughts, and then perhaps converting her responses in some way? I don’t know. Where else would she get them from except me? And when I first had them, she was barely formed.’

‘If that’s true then your dreams should get more complex the nearer you get to giving birth?’

‘It would provide some empirical evidence if they did. The more I think about it, the less fantastic it seems.’

‘I think you’re going to have a problem convincing other people, especially scientists and doctors. They’re going to accuse you of wishful thinking. After all, they don’t even know what dreams are for or are how they work. It’s all speculation.’

‘Well you’re not convinced are you?’

‘No I’m not, but I’ve got an open mind. Convince me.’

‘I think we’re going to have to wait for that.’

We spent New Year’s very quietly, much like every other day really. Judy got on with writing and I pretty much took care of the place, cooking, cleaning, all very boring and domestic, just what I needed. Then Victoria phoned and said she would be paying us a visit to take me to the hospital for my checkup. Did that mean she was no longer going to stay here with us I wondered?

She was very business like when she arrived. We didn’t talk much. She spent some time with Judy while I got ready and then we were off. The ride was a little strained. Every

time I tried to engage her, she would put me off, saying let's wait 'til we get to the hospital, so I didn't push it. Finally, as we entered London I said,

'What's up Victoria, why won't you talk to me? Is there something wrong?'

'No, there's nothing wrong.'

'Then why the cold shoulder?'

'Look Nova, I just think that I should keep a professional distance, that's all.'

'It's Friedland isn't it and your bloody hospital. Or maybe you've found someone who's more cooperative.'

'That's unfair.'

'Is it? But you admit you have another patient, I can tell.'

'Well actually, we've got quite a few now.'

'I knew it.'

'Look Nova, you don't own me you know.'

I inexplicably burst into tears feeling quite embarrassed that I'd revealed myself to be so vulnerable.

'I'm sorry, I don't know what came over me.'

'Oh Nova, I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. Look things are getting complicated. There's been a lot of pressure on me to get you back into hospital. You're the first one.'

'Which means I'm likely to be the first one to have my baby.'

'Well yes but it's not just that.'

'What else is it? That my baby is most the developed obviously.'

'Having a better understanding of what's happened to you helps us with the other cases. Not all of them have gone so smoothly.'

'So now it's emotional blackmail.'

'No, it's not like that. Aren't you curious? Don't you want to know that you and your baby will be okay through to term?'

'Of course I do, that's why I'm coming in for a checkup. But I'm damned if I'll be a guinea pig, I told you that before. And back then, you supported me.'

'Nobody realised the extent of it back then. The change, it's much more complicated than we thought. There are implications and, it's my professional duty Nova.'

'Fine, then get on with it but don't expect me to be a part of it. I care about only one thing and that's having my baby and I'm not having it in your hospital, I'm going to have it at Judy's.'

'What! When did you decide that?'

‘Just now. You made my mind up for me. You know, I could just as easily see a local doctor or midwife, I don’t have to come here.’

‘Oh Nova, don’t be silly.’

‘Don’t tell me not to be silly.’ I was near to tears again and trying desperately not to cry or to get angry. All I wanted to do was get the exam over with and back to Judy’s place, back home.

When we got to the hospital, there was a crowd of reporters at the entrance.

‘Your doing I suppose.’

‘No! Look we’ll go through the back entrance.’

‘Well somebody knew.’

We drove past and round to the back and thankfully there was no one there. By the time we got to Victoria’s office, I was much calmer but still feeling hurt. She sat at her desk and offered me a seat.

‘I take it that you’ve not been following the news then?’

‘No, not really. As I told you, I’m concerned only with the health of baby.’

‘And your dreams?’

‘Doctor Friedland’s been talking to you.’

‘Yes of course he has. You all have them you know, just as you predicted.’

‘And?’

‘Well we’re not sure. We’re not sure about anything Nova except...’

‘Except what?’

‘Well now we think we know what caused it or least the mechanism. It’s built into our genes, or at least the trigger is and we think that such events have been occurring for generations, probably for ever.’

‘Then why haven’t we seen it before?’

‘Probably because there were so few occurrences and none was viable in utero. In other words, men born with the trigger turned on, had other defects, which either caused miscarriages or they didn’t survive for long after birth. Nova, it’s extremely complicated science and there’s no general agreement on how or why the mechanism is triggered, although there’s no shortage of theories, some of them pretty outlandish. We do know that the rate of occurrences has remained unchanged at around point nought four percent and almost without exception, the patients are pregnant.’

‘So you really don’t know much more now than you did at the beginning do you?’

‘Well, no except that we’re almost certain it’s not an accident.’

‘In other words it’s a natural, evolutionary step?’

‘It seems to be the only logical conclusion.’

I felt an immense sense of relief when she said that. ‘So at least I’m not a freak.’

‘I never regarded you as a freak Nova!’

‘So why are you so concerned that I live here, aside from the obvious one?’

‘We’re concerned from your safety Nova.’

‘My safety?’ I felt a shock wave of adrenaline wash through me. My baby! I had to leave.

‘There have been some, unfortunate accidents.’

‘Accidents? Murders you mean!’

‘Well yes murders.’

‘How many?’

‘Well we’re not sure, not a lot, at least in the UK but we don’t know about other countries.’

‘What’s not a lot mean?’

‘I can’t tell you.’

‘You mean you won’t tell me.’

She looked away, unable to face me. I sat there, contemplating my situation, unsure what to do.

Then she got up, ‘Let’s get the checkup out of the way, shall we.’

‘Yes I suppose so, then I want to go home.’

It took over an hour for her complete it. The sonogram showed a healthy, developing fetus, wriggling its toes and fingers. I was fascinated and I couldn’t drag my eyes away from the image.

‘Well your blood pressure’s a bit high, nothing to worry about but we should keep an eye on it. I’m going to give you a prescription though. Elsewise, you seem in perfect health. Your weight is okay. I’ll let you know the results of the blood and urine tests tomorrow.’

I got dressed and picked up the printout of the sonogram.

‘I need to leave, now please.’

‘I wish you would reconsider Nova. We can’t protect you at Judy’s.’

‘As long as nobody knows I’m there, I should be quite safe.’

‘Doctor Friedland wants to see you before you leave.’

‘Please extend my apologies to him but I’ve got to get of here. Tell him to phone me.’

Reluctantly, she agreed to drive me back. We completed the journey in almost complete silence. When we got to Judy's she didn't come in.