

Making Babies OR The Light of Love - by Thomas R. Cuba

Characters

Svetlana - Lesbian Lab worker

Bella - Lab Worker

Yitzak Spintz - Chief Scientist

Mikael - Student assistant

Marina - Subject and Lesbian

Elena - Subject

Natalija - Subject

David Muskovitch - Subject

Aleksei Gregorivich - Lover to Elena

Svetlana leaned over the control panel to the microphone and in a polite, yet authoritative, voice said, "Remove all of your clothing, please. You can fold your things or lay them over the back of the chair by the wall."

Elena began to unbutton her blouse as Svetlana and Bella watched from behind the glass. Bella twisted a knob on the control panel, dimming the lights in the next room where Elena stood. A twist of a second knob dimmed the lights in the control room. Svetlana manipulated controls at the other end of the panel. As she did so, several indicator lights began to glow softly: green, red, yellow, and one larger one emitted a pale blue light. Overhead, a dim orange light illuminated the control panel. As Elena laid her underpants on the chair atop her other clothing, Bella twisted the knobs again, bringing both rooms into deep twilight.

Svetlana leaned toward the microphone again. "Step into the circle outlined in white."

Elena did as she was asked. As she stepped into the circle, she felt the floor move ever so slightly, giving her the impression that it was floating. The floor was firm, but it moved.

"Face the glass wall, please."

Elena complied but it was evident that she was a little unsteady and uncertain about what was to occur next.

“Spread your feet apart to shoulder width.”

Elena was beginning to feel a little uncomfortable, but she had signed the paper and she needed the money that being a subject in the scientific experiment would bring her, so she placed her feet as directed. Bella dimmed the lights so that the room where Elena stood was completely dark. Elena couldn't recall ever having been in such a dark place. There was absolutely no light at all. Instead of being frightened, though, she found it comforting that whoever was behind the glass could no longer see her. At heart, Elena was shy and didn't care to be naked at all, much less in front of strangers. Only a lover should deserve that honor.

The instructions continued to emanate from the small speaker in the corner of the ceiling.

“Stretch your arms straight out to the side, please, and look straight ahead.”

As Elena did so, the speaker crackled again. “In a few seconds, the floor below you will begin to turn very slowly like a merry-go-round or a display in a department store window. Please stand as still as you can and hold the pose we gave you. The rotating floor will turn you so that we can scan your entire body.”

Bella adjusted a knob on the control panel, causing one of the green lights to glow more brightly. Bella and Svetlana watched the screen on the monitoring equipment as it came to life. The chief scientist for whom they worked had mixed technology from Kirlian and Spectral photography and was able to capture the human aura in digital form. The larger blue light on the panel, labeled *Input signal* increased in strength as an outline of Elena's form took shape. Soon, the aura emitted from Elena was painted in all the colors of the rainbow. The outer edges were irregularly saw-toothed, each tooth or spike composed of a different combination of colors.

“Beautiful,” Svetlana said. “Reminds me of the Aurora Borealis.”

Surprised, Bella pointed to the microphone which was still on.

Svetlana nodded in acceptance of the unspoken criticism from her assistant and said, “We're turning on the rotator now. Please remain still.”

Bella turned on the motor as Svetlana asked, “Recording?”

“Starting now,” Bella said as she flipped a switch, turning off the microphone.

It took almost two minutes for the motor to rotate the floor through the entire 360 degrees. The two women watched the monitor intently as it did so. Even though the aura was being recorded, both scientists took notes about their own particular observations that they made about Elena's aura. When her entire body had been scanned, Bella turned off the motor. Svetlana turned on the microphone.

"Please leave your feet where they are but you can put your arms down. They must be tired. We'll take a short rest and then do the same thing again two more times. A two minute scan followed by a short rest."

Eight minutes later, Svetlana shut down the sensors, and Bella turned up the lighting.

"You can put your clothes on. We're all finished."

Bella turned off the microphone as Svetlana watched Elena begin to dress.

"Should we show her?" Bella asked.

"We can't. The subject might be influenced by seeing her own aura and that would ruin the experiment."

"Too bad. She has a beautiful one."

Svetlana smiled slightly as Elena pulled up her jeans. "Yes, she does. You know what? You can show her the pictures when the experiment is complete, if you want."

"Thanks. I think I will."

The knock at the door to the control room was followed by a muffled question.

"May I enter? Is the subject decent?"

Svetlana glanced through the glass and saw Elena buttoning her shirt.

"It's open. You can come in."

Dr. Yitzak Spintz opened the door and poked his head inside.

"Yes?"

"Yes, sir. Elena is completely dressed," Bella said, waving a hand and inviting him in.

"How'd it work? All okay?" he asked as he entered.

"Show him," Svetlana said, as she began to enter meta-data using the keyboard.

Bella used the control panel to retrieve a segment of the video and displayed it on the monitor.

“Ahh....beautiful,” he remarked. “The body is almost completely dark yet the faint outline tells us where the aura is internal and where it reaches out into ... Hmmm. What should we call that? It’s like a corona.”

Bella smiled. “I want to call it her personal space. I was thinking of that while I watched. What if that feeling that someone is in your *personal space* is because their aura is not mixing well with your aura?”

“Ohh! Very good! We shall explore that more deeply!” Yitzak grinned at Bella. “Very observant for a new student assistant! What else did you see?”

Bella pointed at the screen and began to explain. Svetlana continued to enter data but stole a glance or two at the monitor as Bella spoke.

“The aura is nearly constant in color and shape. There are many colors and shapes, but they aren’t changing much. The aura isn’t flickering. There are only minor changes that occur among the three scans. The intensity of the aura drops as it crosses the boundary provided by the skin. The hair doesn’t seem to interfere with the aura at all.” Bella paused, and then made an ellipse on the monitor with her finger, encircling Elena’s head and extending to her breast bone. “Here, however, is the most interesting part to me. The aura is most intense in this area - the area of the brain and the heart. See how it makes an almost hourglass shaped pattern?” Pointing to Elena’s extremities, Bella added. “The aura here, and here, is strong, but less so than the aura below her heart and much less so than the area around her....” She stopped searching for the right word.

“Core,” Svetlana interjected. “That’s her core. In ancient lore, that’s where the soul lives. Somewhere between the head and the heart.”

“Yes,” Yitzak muttered. “That’s good. This is good. Nicely done, ladies!”

“Thank you,” Svetlana said. “The computer is cataloging each shade of color, converting it into a digital map. We’ll be able to subtract one image from the other and will be able to verify Bella’s observation that minor changes occur between the scans. Better yet, we’ll be able to quantify the changes. I think we have a good baseline.”

“Yes, yes,” Yitzak said in a low and quiet voice. “I’ll wait in my office for that.” Turning to his Co-Principle investigator and his new assistant, he asked, “Are there more subjects today?”

“Yes.” Svetlana looked at a clipboard hanging on the wall. “Two more ladies: Marina and Natalija. And one man, Aleksei.”

“Well, I’d better go. I don’t need to be in here when the subjects are preparing to be scanned.”

Bella thought she saw Yitzak blush slightly as he turned and left.

“How long have you been working with Dr. Spintz?”

“We met last year at a conference and, between the two of us and a couple of shots of Vodka, we came up with the protocol. Six months later, we had a grant. It was then that we began working together to set up the experiment and only last week that we began working together daily.” Svetlana glanced at Bella. “Why?”

“I think he likes you.”

“Too bad. Can you get Marina ready?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

An hour and a half later, Svetlana tossed a stack of photographs onto Yitzak’s desk and made herself comfortable in a nearby chair.

“I selected some shots for you to look at. Three women and one man. Front, back, side. The tapes are loaded to the mainframe if you want to go over them in detail. Bella’s gone home for the day, and the subjects were instructed to come back next week.”

Yitzak flipped casually through the photos examining each of them briefly. “So, things went well today?”

“I think so. I’m happy with it. I look forward to next week and being able to compare the auras from today to those we collect then.”

“Yes, the temporal shifting is a big part of our work. What do you expect?”

“Nothing really. I mean I don’t expect them to be the same, and yet, I don’t really expect them to be different. I would guess that if a tragedy occurred during the week, we might see a change, but if our theory is right and the aura is generated by a person’s character or personality then only something dramatic would change the shape.”

“That’s the theory. So, we wait.”

“One thing was odd, though,” Svetlana said as she rose to leave.

Yitzak looked up, questioning her with his eyes.

“The man’s aura extends over the heart just like the women’s do.” Chuckling as she turned to the door, she added. “I’m surprised that a man’s heart has any aura at all – yours excluded, of course.”

* * * * *

Elena waited patiently on a park bench outside the clinic. It was a pleasant day. The experiment had unsettled her, but only for a while. Undressing in the examination room was strange at first. She hadn't been told about that part until Bella was getting her ready for the examination. It wasn't on the application. Bella had told her that only women would be on the other side of the glass, but could she believe that? How many stories had she heard on the news about weird people doing weird things. When the lights went down she felt better but the calm had only lasted until she was told to stand like Leonardo DaVinci's drawing of human anatomy.

A duck quacked to her ducklings nearby, driving these thoughts from Elena's mind. The lake was calm, dressed only in small ripples from the light breeze and the vee shaped wake of the ducks. Overhead, a cardinal called to his companion. Soft footsteps approached from behind. Elena knew who it was by the sweet scent of his body-wash. She smiled in anticipation. The footsteps stopped behind her and a moment later, she felt his breath on her neck just before he kissed her.

"That was weird," he said, coming around the bench and taking a seat beside her.

Elena kissed Aleksei's lips, and remarked, "It was. But the money's good. A hundred dollars to get naked and spin around three times is well worth the embarrassment."

"A hundred dollars a week for 52 weeks! Minimum! The papers we signed included a provision for an extension."

"A hundred dollars a week for each of us, Aleksei."

"Yes. We will have enough money to be married."

Aleksei slid into the corner of the bench and leaned up against the joint between the back and the arm. Elena stood for a moment while Aleksei extended one leg onto the bench, and then she sat down between his legs and leaned back onto his chest. She smiled as she felt his heart beating beneath his hug. Neither one spoke for several minutes.

Finally, Aleksei said, "I'm glad we waited."

"Me too. We can tell our children that we waited to be financially stable before we married and ..."

"And that we waited until then to consummate our love."

"You do still want to wait, right?" Elena asked

To himself, Aleksei admitted that spending the night with his love would be a pleasant way to end the day, but to Elena, he said, "I do."

Secretly, Elena hoped that Aleksei would say that there was no longer a need to wait, but upon hearing his answer, she snuggled deeper into his hug and said, "Good. Me too."

The two lovers sat on the bench enjoying the coolness of the wind, the fading sun, the soft noises that ducklings make, and even the sound of their own breathing. They were falling into an almost trance-like state: the perfect harmony of the perfect love. It was then that Elena felt a tingling throughout her body. It seemed to her that it started as a circle around her, a circle completed by Aleksei's chest and arms. It ran quickly through her and ended with a shudder.

"Did you feel that?" she asked quietly.

"I felt you quiver, just as I had an odd feeling in my stomach and chest. It was almost like when your arm goes to sleep. You know? A sensation of prickles all through me."

"Yeah. That," Elena agreed.

"What was it?"

"I don't know. But it was nice."

"I guess that's what love feels like," Aleksei said. "Too bad we must go now. I must be at work soon. The money from the clinic is a good boost, but we still need to earn our living."

"One more minute. Please?" Elena said. "I've something more to ask."

"Okay," Aleksei said and hugged her close. "What is it?"

"I want to be married soon. I don't want to wait until fall."

Aleksei kissed Elena's cheek and agreed. "I don't want to wait any longer either. We can be married next week? All our friends are here and we wanted a private, informal wedding anyway."

* * * * *

"You want me naked today?" Elena said to the glass wall in the examination room.

"Boy, do I," Svetlana said under her breath. Turning on the microphone, she replied to the question with her professional voice. "Yes, please. We will do the same

test as last time. My assistant is not yet here, but she will dim the lights when she arrives.”

Elena began undressing, unaware that Svetlana was staring in a most unprofessional manner. When Bella opened the door, Svetlana quickly looked away and began warming up the sensors.

“You started without me?” Bella asked.

“She was impatient,” Svetlana said, gesturing to the glass.

Bella dimmed the lights just as Elena stepped onto the circular rotator and struck her Da Vinci pose.

“Ready?” Svetlana said into the microphone while looking at Bella.

Bella nodded and Elena replied, “Yes. Let’s go for a spin.”

Svetlana watched the monitor as Elena rotated and Bella adjusted various settings on the control panel. When Elena had completed two of the planned three cycles, Svetlana said, “What the heck is that?”

“What?” Bella asked, while at the same time making sure that the microphone was off. She couldn’t imagine what might go through Elena’s mind if she had overheard the remark.

Svetlana pointed to the monitor. “That. Right there.”

Elena kept turning and by the time Bella moved to the monitor, whatever Svetlana was pointing at was no longer visible. Svetlana clicked on the microphone. “At the end of this rotation, please stay where you are. Please maintain your position as well.”

When Elena was once again facing the glass wall, Bella turned off the motor that rotated the floor and looked back at the monitor. Svetlana pointed once again. “Make sure we get good still images of that,” she ordered.

Bella used the zoom feature to look more closely at the part of Elena’s aura that had caught Svetlana’s attention. Just above the heart, in the lower lobe of Elena’s aura, was a small sunburst of colors. Bella pushed a button on the control panel several times and then spoke into the microphone.

“We’re going to rotate you about 45 degrees. Please remain as you are.”

The motor whirred to life again, and Elena turned. Bella stopped her and took more photographs of the splash of light that was emanating from near her heart. The new feature was above and slightly in front of Elena’s heart.

“That’s all. Thank you.” Bella said as she increased the light in the examination room.

“What was all that about?” Elena asked as she stepped into her panties.

“We saw something we liked. Something we wanted to get a closer look at,” Svetlana replied, watching Elena restore her modesty.

After clicking off the microphone, Svetlana asked, “Who’s next?”

“Marina. Remember her? She’s that very tall blonde woman.”

“I remember.” Svetlana was attracted to Marina even more so than to Elena. Both of the subjects were off limits and her thoughts were nothing more than an idle fantasy, but she enjoyed them anyway. Svetlana thought that it was very practical for a part of the screening of the subjects to be designed to determine their sexual preferences. Yitzak didn’t want any problems regarding who was watching whom. It was ironic that Yitzak didn’t know about Svetlana’s preferences. There had been no such screening of the examination team.

* * * * *

Elena walked casually into the examination room and began taking off her clothes without being told to do so. Today would be her sixth examination and she was getting used to it. The \$1,200.00 dollars that she and Aleksei had put into a savings account somehow made standing naked in the dark for fifteen minutes an almost enjoyable experience. Perhaps she would never understand why her time was so valuable to these scientists, but she no longer cared. It was easy money and she hoped for an extension at the end of the year.

Svetlana and Bella had also become somewhat complacent in their work. They dimmed the lights, turned on the sensors, spun Elena and the others around and collected video tape and still images. It was up to Yitzak, using Svetlana as a sounding board, to interpret the data. Svetlana was the Co-Principle Investigator, but Yitzak carried most of the intellectual water. Svetlana was smart and educated, but Yitzak also had experience.

Svetlana’s instruction at the end of the examination came as a surprise to both Elena and Bella.

“Put your clothes on and wait for me in the lobby. We need to talk with Dr. Spintz.”

Turning to Bella, and turning off the microphone, she asked, "Can you handle Marina by yourself?"

Bella nodded. "I think so. It will take a little longer, but I can do it."

"Good," Svetlana said and walked out to the lobby to wait for Elena. On her way, she stopped at Yitzak's office. Without even entering the room, she knocked on the doorjamb and said, "Protocol B with Elena in two minutes."

Yitzak nodded his assent. He had expected Svetlana to call up their prearranged contingency the day after Elena's second visit when the spot in her aura had first been noticed. While he waited for Svetlana to return, he pulled up the images from today's examination. As he expected, another change had occurred in Elena's aura, precipitating the engagement of Protocol B. He had little time to examine the data before Svetlana and Elena returned.

"Please take a seat," Svetlana said, gesturing to one of the two side chairs facing Yitzak's desk.

Svetlana sat in the other one as Yitzak attempted to ease Elena's obvious worry over what the sudden visit was all about.

"Don't worry," he said in a calm, almost fatherly voice. "Nothing's wrong. We just have a few questions about your ... about events in your life recently."

Elena relaxed somewhat. She recalled being told that there might be periodic interviews as Yitzak continued.

"Can you stay for a few minutes or should we make a separate appointment?"

Aleksei wasn't scheduled to arrive for his examination for another 30 minutes, so she readily agreed. The interview was quite welcome on this particular day. Talking with the doctor would be more pleasant than waiting in the park on such a dreary and rainy day. It was a short run to the shelter over there but she would still end up being damp, if not drenched, and probably quite cold.

"I have plenty of time," she replied.

"That's wonderful," Yitzak beamed. "Today is your fifth or sixth time here?"

Svetlana smiled. She knew that Yitzak was making small talk to settle Elena's nerves. He knew exactly how many times Elena had visited.

"Six. I think. Yes, six."

“Wonderful.” He smiled again. “So, that means five weeks have passed since your first visit?”

“No, six. Wait. Yes. Five. The first visit was the first day, so five weeks have passed. That’s right.”

“I thought so, but sometimes I get confused.” Yitzak paused, assessing Elena’s body language for signs that she had become comfortable. Satisfied, he went on. “Can you tell us about those five weeks?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, has anything significant happened? Were there any special days or events that have occurred?”

“Well, yes. There are many changes.”

“Will you tell us of them?”

Elena straightened a little in her chair. “On the day of my first visit, my fiancé and I set a date for our wedding. The extra money from the experiment was all we needed to rent our own apartment. The next week ... no, the weekend of the next week, we were married in a private ceremony in the park down the block.”

Elena smiled and blushed. “This is hard to admit, but there was one other change. A big one. From what you told me, I think you need to know. Let me just say that our four-day long honeymoon was pleasantly exhausting. The big change is that up until then, we were both virgins.”

“That’s enough information. We’re glad you had a nice time.”

“Did you go anywhere?” Svetlana asked.

No, but we came everywhere! Elena thought, smiling inwardly.

“No. We spent some free time in the park, and one night we had a nice dinner in town. We both work and we need to save as much money as we can. Besides, we needed to be here for the experiment.”

“Anything else?” Yitzak asked.

“The only other big change has been the growth of our savings account as a result of your generosity. That’s it.”

“Very good.” Yitzak rose from behind his desk and walked around to escort Elena out. “When you come in next week, we will have a physician here. I wish for him to give you a complete physical examination. Is that alright?”

Elena nodded, but her unsteady gait as she walked to the door revealed that she was once again somewhat unsettled.

“No need to worry. This is all part of the routine,” Svetlana added as she held the door.

Closing the door behind Elena, Svetlana turned to face Dr. Spintz. “What do you make of it?”

Yitzak sat back down behind his desk and pawed through the prints that he’d made of Elena’s aura.

“Scientifically, all we can say is that between week one and two, Elena developed a spot in her aura.” Pulling a print from the bottom of the scattered array, he plopped it down on top of the others and put his finger on the image, right between Elena’s hips, pointing to the starburst. “And, between weeks five and six, the spot migrated from her heart to her lower abdomen.”

“And,” Svetlana added, “during that same time, she was married, was quite sexually active, and became financially stable.”

“That’s all correlated, but we need to try to prove causation. Let’s see what the computer can do with this data.”

Svetlana pulled a chair around to the side of Yitzak’s desk so that she could see what he was doing.

“I’ve already had the computer map the time-series of her weekly auras for color and intensity as well as for gradients of both color and intensity. Now let’s separate out the hourglass around her core. I’ll use the aura from day one. The one without the spot.”

A few clicks later, Yitzak resumed his narrative.

“Now, I’ll separate out the starburst spot from the rest of Elena’s aura, using today’s data. The spot is clearer within the weaker aura of her lower torso than when it was up around her heart. Now I’ll ask the computer to compare the map of the starburst to the map of her core aura.”

“Why? What are you looking for?”

“Mostly I’m just turning over rocks, but I did notice some similar ... whatever. See the upper right portion of the spot? It has what appears to be the same blend of blue, green, and orange that we see in Elena’s upper right aura. Same shape too. Here come the results.”

“Wow!”

“A fifty -percent match.” Yitzak pulled up the two images side by side on the screen and adjusted them so that they were the same size.

“I wonder....”

“What?”

Yitzak’s fingers flew around the keyboard. “I’m asking the computer to subtract the data of the starburst from the data of Elena’s core aura.” With a final tap, pieces and portions of Elena’s aura blinked to black as clusters of pixels were subtracted. Half of the aura had turned to black leaving disjointed odd shapes of colored light.

The two scientists examined the remaining aura, looking closely as if they could learn something from what parts remained. Svetlana’s eye caught a flashing icon on the bar at the bottom of the screen. Pointing to it, she asked, “What’s that?”

“New data. But I don’t remember asking for anything.” Yitzak pulled up the command screen and gestured to the entries on the form. “There it is. I accidentally clicked *compare to all* when I submitted the command to subtract the two auras.” Clicking the flashing icon, he added, “Let’s see what it says.”

The screen flashed to black, then to another set of images and a box with explanatory text.

“That one on the left is Elena’s spot, isn’t it?”

Yitzak nodded. “The one on the right belongs to another of our subjects. It’s Aleksei’s. But look here.” Yitzak pointed to an entry in a data box. “It says that the match is fifty percent. Elena’s starburst is the same as half of Aleksei’s.”

“And half of Elena’s! Put them together, please?”

“Huh? ... Oh, I get it.”

Yitzak subtracted the spot from Aleksei’s aura the same way he had done for Elena’s. He then pulled the two partial images up and overlaid one upon the other. The combination reproduced the starburst in Elena’s aura perfectly. “One hundred percent match,” Yitzak said.

“Maybe they’re related. Brother and sister. Cousins?”

“We’ll have to interview them next time after session.”

* * * * *

"Thank you for coming, Elena," Svetlana said as she showed her to a chair in Yitzak's office. "How was your examination?"

"I'm getting used to it. I don't mind being naked now. Not at all."

"No, I mean how was the physical exam with Dr. Berns?"

"It was fine. He was very thorough and seemed quite interested in my stomach and intestines." Elena finished her answer as Yitzak entered. "Is something wrong?"

"No, no. Nothing. Well, not as far as we can tell. Dr. Berns is running some chemical tests and will join us in a few minutes. In the meantime, we want to ask you some more questions."

"Okay. Go ahead."

"Do you know Aleksei Gregorivich?"

"Yes, why?"

"I'll tell you in a minute. How do you know him?"

"He's my new husband." Seeing their startled looks, she hastily added, "On the application, you asked if I had a boyfriend. You did not ask if he had also volunteered. Am I going to be fired?"

"No, no. Not at all. Your aura is fascinating and we want to know everything about you." Yitzak smiled.

"And now about him," Svetlana added.

As she said this, Yitzak was pulling up Aleksei's aura. He scanned through one from each session. There was a small change between weeks one and two, but there was nothing of note.

"Think back again, please, and tell us if there was anything else significant, strange, unusual, remarkable that happened in those first weeks here."

Elena dropped her gaze to her lap, where she played with her hands like a child who's been caught in a lie. "There was one thing. It was odd, but so is this whole experiment." Lifting her head again and looking into Yitzak's eyes, she said, "We had a moment. Aleksei and I. Out on the park bench after the first session. We were sitting very close. Hugging, in fact, and ... it was tingly. It was almost as if we exchanged energy as well as our intention to marry. It wasn't scary at all. It was quite comfortable."

As Elena completed her confession, there was a tap at the door and Dr. Berns entered the room.

“Elena? I have some news for you.” Looking from Svetlana to Yitzak and back to Elena, he added, “It may screw up the experiment but there will be no hiding it.” Smiling, he said, “Congratulations. You’re pregnant.”

* * * * *

After ushering Elena to the front door, Svetlana returned to Yitzak’s office. Bella and Mikael, the male technician who scanned the men, were already there. The trio had moved from the desk and chairs to sit around a small conference table.

“That was an unanticipated development in our study plan,” Svetlana said as she took her seat.

“What’s it mean?” Bella asked.

“What do you think it means?” Yitzak asked his star pupil.

“I saw Svetlana’s write up about the coincidence between the formation of the starburst aura and Elena’s life events. The only new wrinkle is the pregnancy. Do you think that the new aura is from the pregnancy?”

“Can’t be,” Svetlana said. “The aura showed up before they were married and Elena stated that they were both virgins.”

“And you believe her?” Bella asked. The question went unanswered.

“Mikael?” Dr. Spintz brought his other student into the conversation.

Svetlana had placed a number of prints around the table and Yitzak had positioned a computer monitor so that all could see it. Mikael scratched his chin, then gestured to the pile of photographs. “I’ve seen something like that before. One of my male subjects has something similar.”

“Can we see?” Bella asked.

“Sure. Pull it up,” Yitzak said.

Mikael tapped a few times on the keyboard and found the image he wanted. The outline was clearly that of a man. The aura was the same as Elena’s: the core formed an hourglass around the head and heart. Embedded in the core was a small starburst aura.

“What do we know about him?” Yitzak asked.

Mikael scanned the text beside the image on the screen before answering. "He is Daniel Muskovich. Twenty-eight years old. Good health. He works construction, but he works in the office, not on the job site."

"Married? Children?" Svetlana asked.

"No. He's listed his sexual preference as homosexual."

"Well, that doesn't fit with the pregnancy correlation at all," Bella said.

"Have we looked at other subjects?" Yitzak asked.

"We can." Svetlana slid the keyboard in front of her and began paging through the images. When Marina's frontal image from week six was displayed, Bella became excited.

"Look! Marina has a starburst aura too!"

The surprise on Svetlana's face caught Dr. Spintz' attention. "What is it?"

Svetlana tried to dodge the question. "It's nothing. I never noticed that before. I guess I'm embarrassed that I missed it.

Bella attempted to soften the blow. "No, you didn't miss it. That was week six. You were out of the room. I ran that myself. It is I who missed it."

Svetlana took a deep breath. "No. It's more than that." She paused and looked at each of her co-workers before continuing. "I've probably compromised the whole study. You see, a short time before this data was collected, I accidentally ran into Marina down at Greco's pub. We shared some drinks. A lot of drinks. One thing led to another and we ended up in my apartment. She wanted to experiment with Lesbian love and I was only too willing to give her a primer on how it's done."

Yitzak was irritated, but he was also kind. "Svetlana. You have not compromised the study. Only Marina's data is in question. And now it is a question complicated by this anomaly in her aura. Perhaps your lust has inadvertently led us to a new and unexpected discovery. That's how science works. So let us review. Mikael?"

"We have three subjects with inclusions in their aura. Two are women and one is a man. None of them had the aura on the first day that they were scanned. In Marina and Daniel, the inclusion remains above the heart area. In Elena, the inclusion has moved to ... actually, it's almost in the groin, not the lower abdomen."

"Anything else?" Yitzak asked.

"I don't think so."

Yitzak gestured at the screen. "Two of these three have also had a change in a relationship. Elena was married and Marina was introduced ... I'm sorry. Svetlana? Are you seeing Marina? On a regular basis?"

Svetlana nodded. "I'm so sorry."

"Mikael? Can you get Daniel in for an interview? I'd like to know if he has a changed relationship in his recent past."

"Wait a minute," Bella said. "While you were talking, I was going through some of the other subjects. This one, Catherine, was only here for a few weeks, but she has the anomaly too. It was in her lower abdomen. She is fifteen years old and was offered as a subject by her mother. She then withdrew for unknown reasons."

"We should probably talk with her too," Yitzak said and dismissed the meeting.

* * * * *

Svetlana knocked on Yitzak's door but did not wait for an answer before entering.

"Elena had her baby!" she proclaimed.

"That's wonderful!"

"She's here now. She says she wants to keep her appointment to be scanned! Says she needs the extra money now, more than ever."

Yitzak and Svetlana went to the lobby and, after admiring the new little life that had joined the world, Elena handed the bundle to Svetlana and said, "Here. I'll just be fifteen minutes or so."

Svetlana took the baby and went to the observation room. Elena went to the examination room and Yitzak waited in the hall. He had almost decided to go back to his office when Bella opened the door to the observation room and motioned for him to come in.

"But, she's still naked, right?"

"It's okay. You can't see anything but her aura and a faint outline. But you need to see this."

When he entered, Bella pointed to the monitor. "Look. No starburst anomaly."

The implications were not lost on Yitzak. "I want to scan the baby."

"So do we," Svetlana said. "We already asked Elena and she has agreed."

Bella took the child to the examination room and handed her to Elena. She quickly tossed aside the blanket and held the child at arms length while Svetlana recorded images of the child's aura.

Without waiting, Yitzak called up the image on the computer terminal and typed in a few commands.

"It's her," he declared. "The aura of the child is the same as the tiny anomaly that was in Elena's aura for the past nine months. I had suspected something like this. In reviewing the computer mapping of the aura, I noted that the map remained the same but it became stronger and more vibrant with each passing week of her pregnancy."

"And look," Bella said. "Elena no longer has the anomaly. It was the baby all the time." "So, the aura ... the starburst spot ... was a new baby?" Bella asked. "But it appeared before Elena became pregnant. How can that be?"

Mikael looked confused. "And what about Marina? She had an embedded anomaly and she's not pregnant."

"The anomaly faded after a few weeks," Bella replied.

"But then it came back after our weekend in the Bahamas," Svetlana said.

"Did that one fade away as well?" Bella asked.

"No." Svetlana shook her head and added somewhat sadly. Her tone changing only slightly to one with a hint of curiosity, she added, "Marina went back to her boyfriend. Our experiment was over. She was once again having sex with a man. A little later, the smaller aura migrated to her lower abdomen, just like it did in Elena."

"And then there's the young girl, Catherine." Bella added.

"What about her?" Yitzak asked.

"After her name came up in the analysis, we contacted her. She told us that when she was here the first time, she was already pregnant. That was why she withdrew. While we were talking, I pulled up her old scan and ran the same comparison algorithm that Dr. Spintz did on Elena. Catherine's anomaly and her core aura are exactly the same. That means that there was no ..." Bella was unable to find the right word.

"Donor," Svetlana suggested. "In Elena's and Marina's case, the anomaly was an even mixture of two other auras. I know because I had myself scanned, and I was half of the donor for Marina's spot just as Aleksei donated half of his aura for Elena's spot."

"So, what's going on with Marina? Her spot ..."

Svetlana held up a hand to stop Bella from speculating further. "We'll have to wait and see, now, won't we. All I know is that her new aura is a combination of hers and mine and that it's migrated."

Bella was confused. "Well, what happened with Catherine?"

"I know," Mikael said. "Shortly after she stopped coming, a police detective came to the lab and asked me some questions about her. He was investigating her stepfather. Building a case. Apparently, during the months before we began our experiment, she was being raped almost nightly. That's how she became pregnant. I didn't think anything of it at the time. I mean, I didn't think it was relevant to our experiment."

"Now we're getting somewhere!" Yitzak exclaimed.

"What do you mean?" Svetlana asked.

"Look," he replied. "Elena and Marina both had lovers and both had a new aura inside them composed of equal parts of themselves and of their lover. In Elena's case, the aura was transferred to the baby. In Marina's it faded and I'm guessing that it faded because there was no baby ... no fetus ... for it to migrate to. Elena reported an incident of tenderness that was almost tangible. Her shudder, remember? Svetlana didn't say exactly the same thing, but there was love. These pairs of lovers were in each others' personal space. The corona of their aura would be mixing, just as Bella had speculated months ago. In that moment, a mixture of the auras might take up residence in one of the partners. Over evolutionary time, that partner would be the one who would carry the fetus in which the aura would reside. That's why Aleksei had no anomaly. It just makes sense. In Catherine's case, there is a baby ... a fetus ... but no love. No mixing of the auras. The spot ... the new aura ... is exactly the same as Catherine's core aura."

"So," Svetlana said softly. "What you're saying is that ... That we've known for ... forever how to make a new baby. But we've just discovered how to make a new soul? Both the physical and the spiritual parts of a person are a mixture drawn from the parents."

Yitzak held up his index finger. "The mixture only comes when there is love between the parents."