

'Baby Talk'

By Al Pelowski

Characters

New-born baby 'Tanya'
Mother 'Anna'
Father 'Boris'
Practitioners: Me, Nurses

Place

Scene One: Modern Maternity Ward, Emergency Room
Scene Two: In the Middle of the Night after

Question

Can you hear my silent scream?

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Scene One

My phone seems to know when it's an emergency. It seems to jump off the table when it rings. Then I jump.

It's a guy called Boris. 'We're at the hospital, we heard about you through a friend, our baby Tanya is fitting every few minutes and is on a drip and steroids.' 'She's in a box and I can only hold her for a few minutes a day,' the Mother pipes in.

'Will you please come?'

Okay, *Grand mal* seizures, every few minutes, Tanya only eleven days old, in a box, wired up, already on high dose steroids, not sucking from the breast. 'Doesn't sound that good,' I think to myself, walking through dripping, fretful streets to the Northern Line, 'what the hell can I do?' My inadequacies creep in. Thoughts flick across my brain like the passing stations. Chalk Farm.

What is it the neurophysio's have been saying? That epileptic seizures represent a total electro-discharge of the brain? Like sheet lightning flashing through millions of neurones, all at once, and in waves like the aurora. Euston.

The contractions and postures of the seizure reflecting this neural hyper-activity. Over thirty different conditions from autism to schizophrenia have epilepsy as a feature symptom. Think about it! Charing Cross.

Damage, they say. Fronto-temporal lobes, a lot of them. Ameliorate at best. Drugs. Waterloo.

Time to get off. Across a big road, up a lift, and into an exceedingly drab, pre-

feng shui acute room. I don't like these polymer electrostatic carpets. I don't like the lights. Babies in plastic boxes. Tubes sticking out everywhere. Cables strewn across the floor.

Tanya has a drip into her femoral, at least 3 probes stuck on her head, and one on her chest. Boris and Anna both here, next to me, a passle of nurses in blue seemingly passing the time, chatting by a wall two metres away. Otherwise it's quiet. Expectant.

I'm drawn to Tanya laying in her box. Mum and Dad take turns filling me in. I'm looking at a pale, thin ghost-like figure, shamelessly exposed, drugged and imprisoned. I want to take this creature up, out of that perspex box, back into her primal instinctual world, unhook all the gadgets, free her. I try to keep calm. Even though I don't know what it means in this context, I ask for permission to 'treat' their daughter.

Boris introduces me to two of the nurses. I tell everybody I want to hold the baby for several minutes outside the box, but it's okay to leave it attached. No bother. The nurses don't want to look anyway, don't want to know. Or do they? This is the parents' wish & all that. They hang about.

The lid lifts off and Tanya is a naked wee wired-up bundle in my hands. We get a flimsy wrap around her, winding between the drip and wires. I tuck her up under my cheek, high on my left chest, on her front, the wires draped over my shoulder. We have to be careful not to stray too far. One hand on her head, the other her bum. Anna puts a small blanket across. Together we tuck in her babe, trying not to pinch anything.

So tiny, so vulnerable. 'DVP' I call it. Dangerously vulnerable position. What is this Tanya saying? What is she feeling now? How is she relaxing, breathing, curling up?

'Will you accept me, little one? Will you trust me, a stranger, of all people?' I feel her almost asleep, knees tucked in, settled now after the moving about, but her breathing is increasingly held. Her breathing is like trying to cry, or scream. Such an exhausted little bundle.

'Tanya, don't be afraid, let go your breath..just keep talking to me..ask me your questions..'

Okay then..

'How would you like
having a needle sucking up the fluid in your sac?
having your molecules rearranged with every scan?
your father never touching you, all that time, and always playing loud
music that made you angry?
getting your head stuck coming around your Mum's coccyx?'

How could we push, drugged to the teeth?
being pulled out by huge metal pincers gripping the sides of your head?
being treated like this?

Put in a glass prison where they never turn off the lights.
not being able to find your Mother, your nipple?'
We're standing next to the box, swaying a little back & forth, her body speaking
its volumns, having a good moan.

'Hold me, hold me, let me be, but don't let me be alone.'
Now each held breath grips her whole body. Intermittent rigidity. Legs extending.
The next gust of discharge building up like a ground wind being sucked into a
tornado. She dropped into it, sort of. The seizure took over. Autopilot. Tanya just
disappeared in it. Like being sucked down a drain. Her spine coiling, holding, and
snapping back like a whip. I thought of a downed electric cable lashing in a
storm. She's kicking, rattling & rolling, everything caught up in staccato waves of
contraction.

She's less than 5 lbs. and I'm holding on for dear life. I feel every shake, every
convulsion, focused into itself, there on my shoulder, over my own beating heart.

'Oh Tanya, don't hold back...put everything into it, this time..if this seizure
is what you need.

You want to blow your circuits, then let them blow. You want to send a
massive bolt straight into the ground, crash your thunder, then discharge
it.

Build it, okay, build the fit, so that it can work for you right up there in your
head.

Be patient. I can hold you forever, I am holding you...you're free to move,
and you won't be dropped or pulled or pricked again.'

The nurses were crowding in abit now, and I could see that neither Anna nor
Boris were entirely at ease.

This was going on a bit. But Tanya had taken over. I just kept a finger handy for
her mouth. Went with her on every outbreath. Listened to her screaming inbreath
as if there wasn't time. Let her sweat soak away into my shirt.

'...please my little one, trust to Mother Earth this time. Give it to her. All of it. And
may it do no harm.'

When Tanya's contractions finally ended, the tone bubbled out of her like hot sap
from a burning bush. She went as limp as a thread, in seconds. I could only
cuddle her in, keeping her warm. Tears welling up in my eyes. I wanted to pass
her to her Mother but the tubes made it awkward.

I could feel a grey sense of shock around the room. The nurses having seen enough, more than enough, I'm sure, quietly insisting that she go back into the box immediately. Making sure the drip was dripping. The wires transmitting. The blips playing out across the monitors.

Tanya in, lid back on. Taking back their job.

I thought perhaps that Tanya wouldn't mind this time. And I couldn't take on the battle of the breast just then. Babies, Mothers, Fashion & Formulas, Medical Birth, the NHS and all that. We were exhausted.

Then something happened..

Tanya slept. Five, then fifteen minutes passed. No seizures. Not a squeak. Just sleep. We took turns going between toilets, canteen and Tanya's box. I touched every bit of wood I could find in amongst the plastic.

Tanya slept on in that illuminated baby tank for the next three hours, non-stop. First time ever in her life. And nine months and eleven days is a long time in 3-hour chunks.

Ya, something happened, and maybe that something means something.

But on the way home, I was wondering again if anything *reliable* had happened, sceptical as ever; cheered by her sleeping of course, but worried about her general state of health & vigour. Symptom or not, I didn't want her to wake to another fit like that. Where would she get the strength?

When I'm grilling myself, working things over, I normally get on with it...

What does this change portend? For the better or worse?

Have we triggered something beyond her resources? Did I listen well?

Would she ever get to her Mother's breast? Would there be anything there for her if she did? Would it still smell right?

I remember pondering where I got the indefensible trait of wanting to encourage these explosions of healing, these vulcanos of hot turbulence, these fragile birthing forms. Feeling them boiling up is one thing. But wanting to encourage them quite another.

My first marriage maybe, we were explosive like that. As a boy I wouldn't have dared. But later in life a colleague of mine said once that she'd dreamt I'd gone & blown up L.A. Imagine that for a healing crisis!

But, can epileptic lightning be safely grounded? Or does it have to blow itself out in its very violence, sowing destruction everywhere?

Clicking and clacking back through the stations I let it all unravel. Six billion people on this planet and all that. The crowd getting off in Camden Town reminded me that several hundred million of them at least, even today, are right now having a very good time. I compromised and stopped for a pint at the Dublin

Castle.

I felt abit dazed and was early in bed.

Scene Two

In the Middle of the Night

I wake up in a seizure. It isn't a dream. What is going on here? My shirt's rolled up around my neck, cheeks and the pillow-case slippery with saliva. My hair, what's left of it, soaking wet.

I could see myself at the end of it. Like the 'out-of-body' experiences they write about. My head arched back. Muscles rigid. Spine writhing like a snake. I'd left the hall light on and I saw it's ray of light through flashing eyes and railing limbs. They were mine.

It reminded me of an early experience, being in a powerful earthquake in Africa. I knew I was in something but not sure what. It had me in an impossible grip. There was no question of self control. But this was a shake out from within. Me!

I laid there, taking a long time to wake up. Wondering if I could move. Realising the room again.

Eventually I sat up, tested my legs, went to the fridge for a drink. Found myself pacing quickly back & forth through the darkened flat. I couldn't decide whether I felt scared, foolish or just plain happy. I cried in front of a mirror for the first time in years. I giggled, I swayed about. I showered.

Then I got dressed for some odd reason. I wasn't going anywhere. I wanted to ring somebody, for help maybe, at least for a chat, but it was 4 am. 'Okay, you dumb-head. You deserved that. You took it from Tanya, walked out of the hospital with it, and now you've had it. Will you never learn?' I paced the floor, I wanted diversion, a B-Movie, ping pong in Hong Kong, The World Service, the endless repetition of Radio 5, anything.

There was a wee grin on my face that I wanted to wipe off. What can be funny about a *grand mal* in the middle of the night?

I wanted excuses.

'How could we have grounded that sort of energy in that place, on those carpets, in that concrete?' 'She was attached with wires to computers. Everybody around us was worried, wanting it to stop...

There is always hope. 'Good 'ol hope. Maybe it's grounded now, through my bed, into this floor, deep into tubes and pools underground. Maybe that's it. Done.' Talking to myself again. Running through the gears.

But I'm a sceptical optimist at heart. I can learn, and I can laugh.

I went back to bed eventually and dreamt of Mario's way down there on that sunny black beach...and Pria lying under a whale...

Sequel

Boris & Anna are still in touch and send me Xmas cards. Tanya is a lovely schoolgirl. Strong, balanced and bright as a button. She now has a younger sister. The *grand mal* ceased from that day in the emergency ward, and she went home two days later. She found her nipple and her Mother. Maybe not much there at first, but it came, and Mother and Child fed each other and made up for the lost time. Father even learned to hold her, to let her be within his touch.

She had many night-time *petite mal* 'absences' for two or three years thereafter, but they too gradually disappeared. After some 20 'treatments' (there I go again), and years of love at home, I now see her once a year for a checkup. And me? I haven't had another fit myself. Dumb luck? There's no such thing. When there is no choice, what can you choose?

This story is based on two similar cases. The first was many years ago and it taught me to respect epilepsy as a symptom and as an experience. The second case provided the characters and events of 'Baby Talk.' Only names have been changed. Thanks and love to DM and HP. Tell your side of it one day.

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