

## *Pregnancy and Childbirth Dreams\**

**Patricia Garfield, Ph.D.**



I give birth to a baby boy. It's so easy. He just pops out, fully dressed. He's a big baby, about four months old, who crawls around.

The young woman who had this dream had just learned during the day that she was pregnant. Mindy, in her late twenties, had never been pregnant before. She was luminous with pleasure. Several months later, in fact, Mindy gave birth to a healthy baby boy. We shall see how dreams of giving birth to a mature baby or a full-grown child are characteristic of pregnant women.

Women who are not mothers-or never plan to be-can nevertheless benefit from familiarity with the dream symbols of childbearing. Almost all women, mothers or not, dream at some point in their lives of giving birth to a child. Newborn babies have special significance in women's dreams (described toward the end of this chapter).

Today's woman is less likely than her elder sisters to follow the traditional pattern of marrying, housekeeping, and childbearing in rapid succession. The modern female often chooses to work intensely at a career for several years before pausing to have a baby. She may choose to give birth as a single mother or even elect not to produce a baby altogether. Whatever her individual time schedule, when a woman becomes pregnant, it occupies her dreams as well as her daily thoughts. She shares a pattern with women of all time.

Being pregnant is one of life's greatest adventures. For the woman to produce another life from within her own body seems magical. To grow and nurture a child out of herself—with a start from her mate—is almost incomprehensible. Many women, despite worldly success, regard giving birth as their most significant accomplishment, the event that makes their whole existence worthwhile. For these women the wonder of bearing a child is overwhelming.

The dreams of a mother-to-be trace her momentous journey--from the first meeting of egg and sperm to the emergence of the offspring. With hope and fear she follows the developments inside her womb. Her dreams relate her internal story. Here's how it begins.

### **Changes in Sleep and Dreams:**

#### **The High Dream Tide**

During the nine months of pregnancy enormous changes permeate the mother-to-be's body. Some researchers think that women who are pregnant dream more than at any other time in their adult lives.<sup>1</sup> Probably because the female sex hormones are at flood level during her pregnancy, the woman is served a banquet of dreams. This bountiful feast of rapid eye movement sleep (REM) often results in more remembered dreams than usual.

***"I Can Hardly Hold My Eyes Open"***

**Pregnant Women Need More Sleep.** Excessive drowsiness is one of the earliest signs of pregnancy. There is good cause for feeling overwhelmed with weariness. Progesterone, the hormone that stimulates development of mammary glands in the breasts and helps form the placenta, also acts as a sedative; it is secreted in large amounts during pregnancy<sup>2</sup>. This same hormone rises in the latter half of the menstrual cycle, after ovulation, when dream time also increases. It may account for the fatigue women often feel before their menstrual periods are due.

In the first few months of her pregnancy a woman spends more time in the deepest stages of sleep than when she is not pregnant. Mothers-to-be who are able to do so add one or two hours to their sleep time each night. Whenever people focus inwardly, as women do during pregnancy, they require more sleep.<sup>3</sup> As the woman's pregnancy advances, she gets less deep sleep-perhaps because it is difficult for her to be comfortable while lying down. Movements of the baby, or pressure on her bladder as the baby gets larger, cause the woman to wake frequently. This may explain why one team of investigators noted an increase of REM during the second trimester, followed by a decrease in the third trimester, when sleep was poorer.<sup>4</sup>

**Do Pregnant Women Dream More?** While the pregnant woman is sleeping longer and more deeply, she is also probably dreaming more. Studies with humans show that the more we sleep, the more we dream. Also, researchers find that when people under go an accelerated learning program, they dream more than usual<sup>5</sup>; perhaps pregnancy is such a learning period. Furthermore, researchers studying pregnant cats found that as the animals approached delivery, they showed a rapid increase in REM sleep.<sup>6</sup> The cats were dreaming more than usual and they continued to do so into the postpartum period. Although the evidence from humans is not totally in agreement, women's dream time is likely to follow a similar pattern of expansion.

**Dreams Change as Bodies Change.** Throughout her pregnancy a woman's dream topics change. They echo the changing conditions of her body and express her anticipations about her forthcoming child. Some themes and images are typical of the first three months; others are more characteristic of the middle months; still others are more likely to occur during the last few months. Specific dream themes often begin at a characteristic time and continue for the remainder of the pregnancy.

By examining the table Women's Dream Symbols of Pregnancy you can get an overview of dreams themes during the entire pregnancy. Dreams, however, are as complex as the minds that produce them; themes may occur at any time and the categories blend in ways difficult to convey on the printed page. Let's see how.

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**Women's Dream Symbols for  
PREGNANCY\***

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*Ist Trimester Typical  
Dream Images*

*Probable Stimulus*

easy labor and childbirth  
mature baby or full-grown child  
large vehicles, buildings

gardens, fruits, flowers, seeds  
driving big vehicle  
carrying heavy bag, trouble walking  
dangers or intruders  
open doors, falling, drowning, loss, blood  
factories, construction  
small, structures, miniatures  
water, swimming  
small aquatic animals:  
tadpole, fish, lizard

**2nd Trimester Typical  
Dream Images**

love affairs with former lovers,  
other men  
husband being helpful  
husband being difficult  
husband having love affair  
cuddly animals: puppies, kittens, chicks  
mother being helpful or harmful

**3rd Trimester Typical  
Dream Images**

baby's sex and appearance  
baby's name  
special communication with baby  
large animals: lion, ape, monkey  
great waters

details of labor and delivery

journeys, being lost  
rituals, ceremonies, holidays,  
birthdays, rites

awareness of conception  
hopes for easy childbirth  
awareness of growing body

fertility, inner growth  
feeling awkward  
awareness of weight gain  
fear of motherhood  
fear of miscarriage  
awareness of growing fetus  
awareness of small fetus  
the womb's internal fluids  
awareness of fetus in fluid

desire to feel attractive, sexual  
deprivation  
need for support  
feeling insecure, unstable  
insecurity about attractiveness  
awareness of enlarging fetus  
reassessment of old conflicts  
with mother; new hopes for own  
motherhood

**Probable Stimulus**

hopes and fears for baby  
thinking about names for baby  
wish to know baby  
awareness of enlarged fetus  
anticipation of amniotic sac breaking

hopes and fears about labor;  
Braxton-Hicks contractions in sleep  
fear of the unknown  
anticipation of joy of birth

\*These are general trends, not isolated categories; themes and images overlap between trimesters and vary with individual dreamer. List is not conclusive.

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**The First Trimester: Changing and Growing**

### *Conception Announcements*

A woman's dreaming mind sends out announcements of having conceived sometimes before the waking mind is aware of the fact. Several women described dreams that convinced them they were pregnant prior to their suspecting it or to having it confirmed by laboratory tests. One, for example, reported a dream that her physician poked his head around a door, in the midst of unrelated action to announce, "Oh, by the way, you're pregnant!" In other cases women who did not yet know they were pregnant told me of dreams that they were pregnant or had given birth to a baby; these dreams were later proved to have appeared immediately or within days of conception.

**Birth of Mature Babies.** Many first-time mothers, when they discover they have conceived, dream of giving birth to a fully mature baby or grown child. Early in their pregnancy these women rarely know much about the childbirth experience; they often feel apprehensive. The combination of hopes for an easy delivery and incomplete understanding of the actual process leads to dreams of the baby "popping out" or simply appearing. Donna, for instance, when she was first pregnant, dreamed:

I give birth to a full-grown child. He is like a miniature adult, dressed like an adult, and walking and talking like a grown-up.

Perhaps an older baby or child seems less threatening than a fragile newborn to the inexperienced mother. Donna thought the adult baby in her dream reflected her anxiety that she would have to go back to work and would therefore miss her child's growing up. Whatever the reason, first-time moms typically dream about older babies or easy childbirth.

**Back to the Conference.** Experienced mothers, too, may exhibit this dream theme. Just before Bonnie and her husband decided to try for a second child, she dreamed:

My husband is at a conference. There is a hospital right next door. I don't look pregnant at all. I walk through double doors to the hospital, have some kind of labor-not much-get up, take the baby girl, and hurry back to the conference. She looks like a newborn, but I'm not that attached.

Although she is familiar with labor, in the dream Bonnie undergoes a simple childbearing process; she gets right back to her husband. Significantly Bonnie's husband, who is, in fact, exceedingly busy, does not come with her to the hospital in the dream. Hence her haste to be at his side again, to not miss a thing. During the dream, Bonnie is not "attached" to the newborn, but afterward she liked the idea so much, she seriously set about having a second child—a boy, to her surprise. Notice the double doors in Bonnie's dream. Doors often represent the opening to the womb in dreams, as we'll see later.

In addition to dreaming about grown-up babies or easy birthing, women also speculate, like Mindy in the opening dream and like Bonnie, on the sex and appearance of their child-to-be. (We discuss these dreams in a later section.) By the time she has been pregnant a few months, the mother-to-be is more likely to have realistic dreams—if not outright frightening ones about her forthcoming labor and infant. She may also have dreams of incredible beauty in which she shares secrets in a mysterious communication with her unborn child. These modern mothers follow in an ancient tradition.

**Holy Mother Dreams.** Long before there were laboratories to measure dreams or therapists to interpret them, people in olden times believed that the dreams of pregnant women were predictive.

Almost every great religious or legendary figure is reputed to have been forecast by one of his mother's dreams. Familiar examples are the biblical account of an angel appearing to Mary to announce her being impregnated by the Holy Spirit, as well as Joseph's dream of being reassured by an angel that his future wife was carrying the Son of God.

Less well known in the West is the story of Queen Maya, the pregnant mother of Buddha, who is said to have dreamed that a rare white elephant with seven tusks, resplendent with radiant light, entered her side while she slept. Her seers interpreted the dream as indicative of a forthcoming savior of mankind.<sup>7</sup>

Likewise in Irish and Scotch legend the pregnant mother of the future Saint Columba, named Elthne, reputedly dreamed that she was given a beautiful cloak; it lifted into the sky and spread above the land and sea.<sup>8</sup> In retrospect this dream seemed prophetic of the influence her son "spread," bringing Christianity to the highlands and islands of Scotland. Whether such dreams actually occurred to the mother-to-be or whether they were attributed by later legends is impossible to say.

We do know that all pregnant women conjure up dreams anticipating the characteristics of their unborn child. The contemporary mother-to-be shares the same hopes for her future child, and the same fears, as those mothers of long ago. The holy mother-who is informed in a dream of the spiritual quality of her forthcoming child-is an archetypal pattern that is alive in the modern woman, as we shall see. It has a powerful impact upon the pregnant woman who dreams it.

After all, a woman with a child in her womb faces a major life experience a milestone in womanhood. Body and emotions undergo upheaval. This life crisis brings unprecedented opportunity for personal growth as the woman sets out on her great adventure.

### ***Big Buildings and Bulky Vehicles: The Pregnant Woman's Changing Body***

"I feel like a stuffed olive!" pregnant Leah announced to me one day. In her olive sweatsuit with red collar and cuffs covering her rounded belly, she conjured up quite a picture in my mind. The woman who has conceived clearly notices the changes taking place in her body and the different way it is beginning to function. These changes are paralleled by alterations in her body image and how she feels about herself.

Feelings of self-esteem are closely related to how a woman perceives her body. Unfortunately most women-pregnant or not-have a distorted image of their actual shape. One team of investigators found that two out of five women overestimated the size of one or more body part by 50 percent or more.

<sup>9</sup> In general women saw themselves as 25 percent larger than they actually were; men saw themselves as 13 percent larger. Women consistently overestimated their measurements compared with men.

Another study found that women are more critical of their bodies than men are of their bodies.<sup>10</sup> Investigators concluded that women judge themselves more harshly in appearance in physical fitness, in health, and in sexuality. The researchers commented, "Little boys are taught to be proud of themselves because they are strong and athletic. Little girls learn to value beauty." A woman's feelings about her body may either improve or deteriorate during pregnancy.

The emotional response of a mother-to-be to her changing figure is determined in large part by her experience of gestation and her attitude toward being pregnant. Contrast these two comments I collected from women:

I hated being pregnant! I hated the way I felt and the things that were happening to my body. I felt it was an intrusion, an invasion-like a cancer.  
[This woman terminated her pregnancy at two and a half months.]

I loved being pregnant! I never felt better in my life. My complexion cleared, my hair got glossy. People told me I looked radiant. I loved the sensation of the child growing within me-it was magical.

[This woman carried to term and delivered a healthy child.]

Most pregnant women are somewhere between these extremes. They feel both happy and anxious; they are ambivalent about the impact of a child upon their love life or their career or their figure.

Nanette, in her early eighties, recalled that despite being thrilled to be pregnant with her first child, she felt "ashamed people would see my big belly." She had a dressmaker make a large navy blue cape that concealed most of her figure, adding, "I never went on the street without it."

Today's woman may think of her fertile figure as a badge of pride. However she, too, is highly conscious of how her growing shape affects her comfort and mobility. These attitudes are vividly portrayed in her dreams.

**The Spare Tire.** When pregnant with my daughter, I dreamed:

I am driving a car. At the same time I carry a spare tire around my waist.

Awake, it was obvious that the "spare tire" was my expanding midsection. Driving a vehicle is often a metaphor for the way the dreamer is moving through life at the moment; with the spare tire, my movement was rather clumsy.

Pregnant women frequently picture themselves driving trucks, buses, or other vehicles that are more difficult to maneuver than cars in their dreams reflecting their perception of awkward movement. Such dreams usually start early on and may continue throughout the pregnancy.

**The Handicapped Dreamer.** Another image women employ to express their sense of ungraceful movement is that of difficulty walking. Joan, in her thirties, dreamed the following near the beginning of her sixth month of pregnancy:

I line up for a scan search (in an airport) for weapons. It seems like a school situation. I have great trouble walking, like a woman I know who has multiple sclerosis. Since I am at the front of the line, everyone is held up because of me.

Joan's feeling of growing awkwardness in getting around led her to picture herself as handicapped. The comparison of the airport to a school situation suggests that she saw herself in a situation where she was learning, as well as undertaking a journey. Perhaps she also thought of her pregnancy as a kind of "hidden weapon."

Many women describe dreams of having too much to carry, such as toting unwieldy packages or heavy suitcases. These, too, portray a woman's awareness of extra weight as her baby grows bigger.

**Confronting the Intruders.** When Leah was about three months pregnant, she was worried about her weight gain. At the same time she was reading material about influencing the mind. One technique involved focusing on a word that epitomized a desired change; Leah chose the word *confidence*. She asked herself, "If I were more confident, how would I act? What difference would being more confident make in my life?" She pondered this before bed, went to sleep, and dreamed:

I seem to wake up in my bed with the impression that someone is in the house. I get up and go out the bedroom door. Instead of there being a porch, as there actually is, there was another room. A kind of violent, evil man is there, like the character from the film *Blue Velvet*. I chase him out.

A few days later I dream the same thing:

There is an intruder in the house. This time I chase the person through room after room. I finally confront a kind of pudgy woman with drab blond hair. Instead of being afraid, I go right up to her and ask, "Are you the terminator?"

Many pregnant women, like Leah, find themselves dreaming of an intruder in the house. Since a house or room in women's dreams often represents the dreamer's body, the "intruder" is a typical initial reaction to the presence of the fetus. The British even use the phrase *a little stranger is coming* to refer to the condition of pregnancy. Leah, instead of being terrified by the stranger, copes with his presence.

In Leah's dreams there are extra rooms that do not exist in her actual home. These are probably a reference to her expanding body. In fact, when I asked Leah to tell me about the pudgy female character, she explained that the woman looked tough and uncomfortable; she added that it was difficult for her to gain weight even though she loved being pregnant. So one of the things Leah was confronting in her dreams was the change in her body, her "internal room." The phrase *the terminator* may be a pun on carrying a baby to "term." Leah would certainly be pudgy by then. It could also be a reference to the fact that Leah plans to "terminate" her job and become a full-time mother.

Leah felt good about these dreams. "The part that struck me is that I was aggressive, how I'd be if I were more confident. Usually I'd be so afraid, I wouldn't do anything." Without realizing it, Leah had come upon an effective way to help herself be more comfortable in frightening dreams. Later we will see how a similar method of increasing dream assertiveness is thought actually to be associated with easier childbirth.

**Construction Under Way.** Researchers who have studied the dreams of pregnant women observe frequent references to buildings in them, from simple rooms to soaring skyscrapers. The dream buildings are often places where things are made, such as a factory or a shipyard, probably paralleling the "making" of a baby that is taking place inside the woman's body.

In a landmark investigation of the dreams of sixty-seven women, psychologist Patricia Maybruck found that 18 percent of the 1,046 dreams she collected contained references to buildings or other architecture.<sup>11</sup> Her study is important because she personally interviewed twenty-five of her subjects, in addition to collecting dreams from the overall group, whereas many dream studies rely solely on questionnaires, on dreams collected without personal discussion with the dreamer, or on dreams submitted by mail.

Perhaps pregnant women dream about buildings because they are hypersensitive to their "enlarging inner space."<sup>12</sup> Indeed the type of building pictured in the woman's dreams may increase in size as her pregnancy progresses. Maybruck found that dream buildings became larger and more complex the closer the woman was to term; skyscrapers were especially common.<sup>13</sup>

Among my subjects Joan recorded her dreams throughout her pregnancy. She belongs to a dream group and keeps a regular dream journal. One of her earliest pregnancy dreams included miniature buildings, but her latest pregnancy dreams had buildings no larger than a restaurant and a small house. Her thirty-three pregnancy dreams did not show a marked tendency for buildings to increase in size or complexity, so this trend must vary from dreamer to dreamer.

Joan contributed a special dream from her sixth month that refers to a part of a building; she called it "Home Sweet Cubicle":

There has been another shift of desks and people at work. This time my Cubicle is in a very quiet, isolated part of the floor. I welcome the peace and solitude. My furnishings include a bed and a stove. I lie in bed, feeling very relaxed. A good friend from work, who is also a member of my dream group, tucks me in. There may be lots of activity all around my area, but within my own sphere reigns peaceful calm.

Here we see the shift of Joan's attention from the outer world of her work to her inner space. Her unborn child had quickened within her. She stocked her dream with all that she needed nearby-the bed to rest in and the stove to prepare nourishment-and she felt the peace of a contented mother-to-be. Pregnancy is the time for withdrawal from the outer world of activity to focus upon the marvels taking place within.

### ***Plants and Doors: The Growth and Stability of Pregnancy***

**Abundant Growth.** Plants, flowers, and fruit have long symbolized the fertility of the earth and of woman. Mother Earth gives forth food to feed the animals and the people who walk upon her surface. Ceres, the Roman goddess of growing vegetation, from whom we get the word *cereal*, is typically pictured with sheaves of grain; her name comes from the same root as the word *create*, indicating her role as giver of life.<sup>14</sup>

This fruitfulness of woman is depicted in Botticelli's famous painting *La Primavera* (Spring). When I saw the original of this picture on display at the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, I was impressed with the figure of Spring. The artist shows her belly great with child, her head wreathed in flowers, her neck in garlands, her body covered with a flowery print dress, and her arms full of blossoms. The trees above her are heavy with fruit; the grass below her is lush with bloom.

This same fruitfulness characterizes the dreams of pregnant women. Walking through grasslands, pastures, or fields; filling flower boxes, tending gardens, or growing vegetables or fruit-such dreams are typical of Pregnancy. "Nursury" is a word that means a place where children are cared for as well as a place where plants are raised. It is sometimes used as a pun in the pregnant woman's dreams. If you are a woman who thinks she might be pregnant or who already is, look for images of growing things in your dreams.

**Delicate Seedlings.** Even suspecting that she is pregnant can lead a woman to a fertility dream, as it did for Sheila the month before she conceived:

I see brown earth being watered. Tiny shoots of tender grass appear. I say to myself, "The seed springeth up." I know we must be careful not to overwater the delicate seedlings and wash them out. Then other things get watered. I stick a knife into soft mud.... Later I see green algae forming in a glass above a sink.

Sheila had had intercourse with her husband without using a contraceptive the morning preceding this dream. She was not sure exactly when her period was due, but she felt that if she did become pregnant, it would be all right.

Notice the typical symbols of sexual intercourse and fertility in Sheila's dream. Her body was the "brown earth" that provided rich soil for planting. The water represented the semen that was deposited; the knife in the soft mud was a metaphor for the penis in the soft female body; the delicate seedlings and the green algae were the potential embryo that might have formed; the glass was the container that, like her womb, could enclose growing things. Sheila expressed concern in this dream that the seedlings could be washed out. The following month she actually conceived and carried to term a healthy infant.

**Ripe Grapes.** Maybruck describes similar imagery in one of her thirty-seven-year-old subjects who had been trying unsuccessfully to conceive for three years. When the woman dreamed, "I look down, and huge, ripe bunches of grapes are growing from my belly!" she knew for certain conception had finally occurred.<sup>15</sup> Later on in pregnancy, Maybruck observed fertility dreams that included lush jungles.

**Miniature Gardens.** Joan, during her first few weeks of gestation, dreamed:



I am bicycling through the shipyards containing miniature gardens and streets. [This reminds her of shipyards in Pearl Harbor she has seen and of a miniature village in Holland.]

The shipyard backdrop dissolves. I am now swimming indoors in a curved pool, which is bordered by tiny model villages. This time I would imagine I am in a movie set.

Here we see Joan moving through life under her own power (the bicycle) into an area where construction takes place (the shipyard), paralleling the building of the baby within her. The miniature gardens symbolize the little, growing being inside her body; the image of water (the pool where she swims) represents the uterine waters gathering in her body at the time. We shall observe how water is a popular image throughout pregnancy.

**The Open Doors.** As a pregnancy progresses, women often express their concern about its stability in their dreams. Shortly after my daughter, Cheryl, conceived, she dreamed:

A girlfriend and I are driving a school bus. Her two-year-old son is playing up front. The bus doors open and he starts to fall backward, out of the bus. "Look out!" I shout. We grab the child.

Cheryl had experienced some common early pregnancy spotting around the time of this dream; the images probably represented her anxiety over a possible miscarriage. Luckily this did not occur, just as she managed to save the child in the dream.

Notice the school bus that usually contains children—this dreamer's version of the bulky vehicle typical in dreams of pregnant women. The open doors represent the "doors" to the womb that could open too early to release the precious child, as well as signifying the risky situation in general.

Other themes that express this same concern have to do with dreams of lost children or children falling or drowning.

Unhappily for some mothers-to-be, a miscarriage does occasionally take place. Robert Van de Castle, in a speech to the Association for the Study of Dreams in 1986, documented dreams from his vast collection that were associated with miscarriages.<sup>16</sup> They included: recurrent dreams that the dreamer was starting her period; dreams of being in a bathtub when the water turned red with blood; and a dream of a strange lady telling the dreamer three times, "You can't take care of it!"

Van de Castle also described a dream in which the pregnant woman saw her infant baby on the examining table with her obstetrician; he discontinued the exam because the baby was too cold. This woman's fetus died in the womb. In another case the dreamer saw her mother baby-sitting her child; the mother put the baby into a refrigerator, where the dreamer found it icy cold. This woman's child was born dead. It seems these women sensed the coldness of the fetus in their wombs. In yet another case the pregnant woman dreamed that her grandmother poisoned her to kill the baby; later it was discovered that she was carrying twins, one of whom had died.

Let me emphasize that these instances are unusual. It may be small comfort for the mother who suffers such a loss, but physicians assure us that most spontaneous abortions or death of a fetus are nature's way of eliminating imperfect babies. Most pregnant women have alarming nightmares that prove totally unfounded. Frightening dreams may even be actively beneficial, as we will see.

**Lost Baby Found.** Dreams are part of the healing process. When she was pregnant in her early thirties, Cassie underwent a therapeutic abortion at four months. She did not want to do so, but her doctors insisted. Later she dreamed of her baby many times:

Sometimes it's a boy, sometimes a girl. I will be holding the baby, not sure if it's mine. It seems to be partly my baby and partly someone else's. I don't feel sad during the dream, but afterwards it is very painful.

Such dreams, grievous as they are on awakening, pave the way for the dreamer's acceptance of a sad reality. They facilitate the healing process in the same manner that a soldier's traumatic experience may be relived in nightmares; eventually the event is incorporated, and life can go forward constructively. For Cassie, now in her middle thirties and pregnant again, the future may be better. So far her physician thinks she can carry to term without endangering her life.

***Rising Waters: Awareness of Amniotic Fluid***

From goldfish bowls, to family wash, to swelling oceans, the pregnant woman's dreams refer to water throughout her pregnancy. The mother-to be will often find herself swimming, as Joan did in the curved pool, in her first-trimester dreams. Where animals appear in a pregnant woman's first trimester dreams, they are often aquatic creatures, such as tadpoles and fish. This water in her dreams possibly depicts the pregnant woman's awareness of the water gathering within her womb.

In her second trimester Cassie had an impressive dream with water:

I am going to a girlfriend's house. I think, "After I deliver the baby, I will live here. I go inside. It is really big (much more than it actually is). On a big bed are many, many babies, all naked and playing. They are crowded.

I go into another room, where I will be staying. This is smaller. I see a four-year-old boy floating in a golden fish tank. His body is in the water with his face sticking out, with a plastic bag containing air over it. I think, "Oh, no, he will drown!" But he looks very comfortable, smiling. He is happy there.

Part of this imagery is characteristic: the house that was bigger than reality probably related to Cassie's own growing body; the many babies implied the growth within her womb (perhaps her potential for more children); the water symbolized her amniotic fluid. I was puzzled, however, by the boy who seemed to be drowning. From amniocentesis Cassie knew that the baby she was carrying was a girl. Past experience has shown me that dates and figures are almost always symbolic in dreams, so I asked Cassie, "What happened four years ago?" Without hesitation she replied, "That's when I had the [undesired] abortion. it was a boy." The four-year-old in her dream represented the child she had lost. His smiling attitude suggested that Cassie has accepted the past. Pregnant with a new baby, she looks forward with happier feelings. In a later dream Cassie was having fun bathing a little boy.

Water in dreams may take on a dramatic form as pregnancy progresses. Toward her due date, the pregnant woman is more likely to dream of water as a symbol of the "breaking waters" that announce imminent childbirth. At the end of her second trimester Cassie dreamed of carrying a heavy schoolbag when big ocean waves rose and endangered her. In one of her third-trimester dreams Joan was in a region where the projected rainfall was 700 Inches-a heavy gushing of waters indeed. Maybruck observed among her subjects, instead of the calm lakes or pools of early pregnancy, dreams of bursting water tanks or turbulent rivers.<sup>17</sup>

We begin our lives as water creatures, suspended in a sea of liquid within our mother's womb. Even embryos fertilized in a culture dish outside the womb require return to the inner ocean for nourishment. The pregnant woman is drinking fluids for two, herself and baby. Small wonder that her dreams overflow with images of water.

To summarize, then, during the first three months of a woman's pregnancy, her typical dream pictures and their possible causes include the following:

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***Dream Image***

***Probable Stimulus***

Easy childbirth and mature babies

Conception, hopes for easy labor

Large vehicles, buildings, luggage  
 Gardens, fruit, and flowers  
 Dangers or intruders  
 Open doors, blood  
 Small animals, often aquatic  
 Water

Awareness of changing figure  
 Fertility and inner growth  
 Fear of motherhood  
 Fear of miscarriage  
 Awareness of small fetus  
 The womb's gathering fluids

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These images ebb and flow during the following months. After the changes in her body and the growth of her fetus are well established, the pregnant woman's dreams focus more on the main people in her life: her unborn child, her previous children, mate, mother, and other significant folk.

### **The Expectant Father's Dreams During the First Trimester**

In their own dreams fathers-to-be are busy reacting to their woman's pregnancy. During the first few months men with pregnant mates are likely to have many more sexual dreams than usual, according to an intriguing study conducted by psychologist Alan Siegel in Berkeley.<sup>18</sup> The fathers-to-be in his study dreamed of having sex with their wives, with other women, with prostitutes, or sometimes with homosexuals early in their wives' pregnancy. In contrast, mothers-to-be tended to have sexual dreams toward the end of their term.

Siegel speculates that the protective feelings a man develops toward his wife and unborn child may be threatening to his masculinity. His sexual dreams and other macho visions (such as triumphs on the football field) may be expressing a need to be more "masculine." They offer reassurance.

At the same time he is having an unusual number of sexual dreams, the expectant father often dreams of protecting and caring for his wife. The sexual dream theme usually drops out as the pregnant wife moves into her second trimester, whereas the protective themes continue. The pregnant woman can help her mate avoid feeling left out—a typical reaction—by sharing dreams and recognizing that these common sexual themes are not a threat to her in themselves. Sharing dreams can help the couple understand each other's feelings throughout pregnancy. The husband's and wife's relationship becomes an important focus in the couple's dreams during the second trimester.

### **The Second Trimester of Pregnancy: Dreams About Important People *Baby Animals: Dreams About the Fetus***

Kittens, puppies, chicks, tadpoles, fish, lizards—these are some of the animals that typically wander through the dreams of pregnant women. These creatures probably represent the fetus within the woman's womb.

**Hungry Babies.** During the time I was pregnant and preparing to nurse, for instance, I dreamed several times:

I see dozens of tiny starving kittens. I wonder desperately how I can feed them.

My fondness for kittens probably accounted for their appearance in these pregnancy dreams: kittens also feed on milk, as human babies do. Lack of confidence in my ability to nurse successfully is the likely explanation for the overwhelming number of tiny, hungry creatures in my dreams. I felt somewhat overwhelmed with becoming a mother. The fear proved unfounded, as I later happily nursed my daughter for her first year.

**More Animal Dreams in Pregnancy.** Dreams about baby animals are especially characteristic of the mother-to-be. Both little girls and boys frequently dream of animals. Some studies report that more than 60 percent of children's dreams have animals in them, whereas adults typically report about 7 percent of their dreams to contain animals.<sup>19</sup>

However, when a woman becomes pregnant, her dreams of animals increase. She dreams more about animals than the nonpregnant woman. Among the expectant mothers in her study, Maybruck found that animals, including fish and amphibians, appeared in 17 percent of their dreams.

<sup>20</sup> Participants in my study showed a similar larger number of animal dreams. Joan, for instance, had animals in six of her thirty-three pregnancy dreams, a rate of 18 percent.

Each age group dreams of animals for different reasons. Children, theorists speculate, identify with the instinctual elements of animal behavior. Girls and boys probably use animals in their dreams to represent the self, free of social regulations and able to express anger toward adults; at other times the dream animals probably symbolize people the child perceives as threatening.

For most adults dangerous animals in dreams symbolize a "wild" emotion arising within themselves or else a sense of threat in their environment. But for pregnant women animals seem to symbolize the fetus.

**Different Animals at Different Stages of Pregnancy.** The type of animal the woman dreams about usually shifts with her stage of pregnancy. During the first trimester, women commonly picture fish or reptile-like creatures in their dreams. It is as if they could telepathically see into the womb where the tiny embryo, floating in fluid, undergoes transformations that recapitulate the evolution of sea creatures to land mammals. At the same time the pregnant woman is often reading illustrated books and learning about the stages of development of the fetus, reinforcing her awareness of the changes that are happening to her unborn child.

Whether the dream animal is aquatic or not, it is typically small in the dreams of the first trimester. When Cassie was two months pregnant, for instance, she dreamed:

I go out the back door of my house and I see in the neighbor's yard their pet dog with many small black animals. They are a triangular shape, a kind I never saw before. They are playing with some rats on a little hill of dust.

When I open my door to go back in, they try to follow me. They climb up over the fence after me. Many, many of them surround me. I am afraid they will come inside. I close the door again. I don't know how to deal with them. They don't look harmful. What happened?

Although Cassie has very much wished to become pregnant, her dream imagery of the strange, small black animals suggests she feels puzzled about how to cope with the situation. She may have felt a mild threat as these animals invaded her space—a common reaction to the child in the womb.

During the second trimester, the pregnant woman's dreams contain animals that are more babylike, such as pups, chicks, and kittens. Depending upon her attitude toward the pregnancy, her mate, and her situation, the animal may be either threatening or lovable. In one of Joan's dreams during her fourth month of pregnancy:

While visiting Mother, I sit by myself in her living room. Near me on a chair is a pet of hers, a gibbonlike creature. I keep my distance from him, afraid he might bite. He climbs around on the furniture, and nibbles on some squash in a hanging basket.

This dream suggests Joan felt some ambivalence about the effect of the strange new creature coming into her life. Would its presence be destructive?

The quickening of the child within the womb is often described in animal terms by pregnant women. Kerry, for instance, said the first small movements of her fetus felt "like butterfly wings." Eva said they felt "like I swallowed a bird and his wings are still going, fluttering." Perhaps these small internal sensations make it easy to dream of the fetus as a small animal.

The final three months of pregnancy may be marked by dreams of larger animals, such as a lion, along with dreams of the actual fetus itself. There is no hard and fast rule, however, only overall tendencies. Animals of every size may appear in dreams throughout gestation.

**Friendly Animals During Pregnancy.** The presence of friendly animals-rare and charming creatures in dreams-is generally thought to represent a good relationship between the dreamer and his or her instincts.<sup>21</sup> In the dreams of many pregnant women, animals are frequently cuddly and cute. Maybruck found that although dream animals were sometimes threatening to the pregnant women in her study, during the second trimester they were most often of the appealing, adorable variety.<sup>22</sup>

Cheryl, for instance, during her fourth month of pregnancy dreamed:

I am somewhere with my husband and friends. It is a weird place in Mexico, almost a hovel with poor people. We are smuggling dogs back home-one for everyone. They are young puppies, not little ones. I bring them. They are so cute! At the end we're in an apartment of mine in Canada.

The strange place where Cheryl found herself was undoubtedly the land of pregnancy, where she had never been before; it seems foreign yet near home to her. She was the one carrying the puppies for everyone, just as she carried her unborn child. The fact that they were being smuggled suggests the hidden quality of her pregnancy at this stage. Finding the animals cute reflected her positive attitude toward the child-to-be.

Friendly dream animals foretold easy childbirth among the Ojibwa Indians. They believed that to dream of an animal that had easy labor and delivery-such as a bitch, a mare, or a cow-could bless the woman with childbirth powers. A woman who aspired to be a midwife was required by her culture to have one of these favorable dreams to qualify for her post.

One popular midwife, for example, described to investigators a dream of a "she-wolf" who resembled a person with a wolf's voice. The dream creature informed her that she would bear five children-which she subsequently did. Licking her hand, the wolf added that she would assist her in childbirth. A dream of this sort would surely encourage any pregnant woman in her waking-life task.

Even today, in some parts of Japan, the pregnant woman may use as underwear a special *obi* (a bellyband) inscribed with the character for *dog*. Since it is believed that dogs have an easy labor, people hope the writing will help the woman to have a comfortable delivery.<sup>23</sup>

Joan, in a dream two days after her baby girl was born, saw herself as the helper: she called it "The Cat in the Fat":

I enter the house and in the kitchen see a jar of fat drippings with the top of a small cat head protruding from it. I think at first that one of our cats has climbed into a jar and become stuck, and I laugh.

I realize I must get the cat out, so I grab it by the head and gently pry it loose. It looks like a newborn baby, covered with cheesy, fatty substance. The creature was so helpless. I saved it.

Joan drew a charming sketch of the stuck cat. Her rescue of the dream creature and her compassion for it paralleled the childbirth and her sense of bonding to her helpless newborn. She gently pried it out of her body. This dream vividly dramatizes the fact that dream animals symbolize the fetus.

If you are pregnant, you may find that the animals in your dreams develop from sea creature to land mammal, repeating the journey of primeval ancestors; at other times you may find you dream of your unborn child directly. Your feeling about the animal or baby reveals something about your attitude at the time of the dream. From birth onward the baby often appears as himself or herself, a human being with body and spirit.

### ***Former Lovers, Spouses, and "Other Women" in Dreams: Relationships With Mates***

**The Lover From Long Ago.** Veronica spoke to me in a low, confidential tone so that her husband, who was talking in the next room, might not overhear her words. Nearly six months pregnant, Veronica was troubled by her dreams:

For weeks I've been dreaming about my old boyfriend. Wild, sensuous dreams. I'm with him again, kissing and making love-it's as passionate as ever. When I'm awake, I have fantasies about wanting him to see me with a child. What's going on?

Dreams about former lovers, delicious as they may be while in process, often torment the dreamer when she awakens. The pregnant woman has difficulty understanding why she should choose this time of supreme intimacy with her mate to hark back to loves of long ago, or else to fantasize about new dream lovers, celebrities, or seductive strangers.

**The Masterful Magician.** Erotic dreams are more likely the larger the mother-to-be gets; they tend to occur most often during the final three months. Like most dream themes, however, they may surface at any time during the pregnancy. This one is from Joan's first trimester:

I am in bed with an old magician; he does a masterful job of bringing me to a climax. I never expected he would have such a great touch!

The reasons for erotic dreams in the pregnant woman are as varied as the women themselves. Nevertheless most mothers-to-be share a concern about their changing figure and its effect on their sex life. Intercourse is necessarily more awkward during the final months of pregnancy. Many couples are fearful of hurting the child within the womb and so curtail their usual activity. Deprived of her accustomed regularity or intensity of sex, the expectant mother sometimes compensates for it in her dreams.

Beyond whatever physical deprivation they may feel, pregnant women often feel insecure about their continued attractiveness to men. Gripping furniture for support in raising or seating herself, her ankles swollen, the mother-to-be finds her body increasingly difficult to maneuver. She sometimes feels less comely as a woman. Her dreaming mind offers reassurance in the ecstatic love-making of sexual dreams. Sensuous dreams are fairly common during pregnancy.

In addition to the pregnant woman's concern about her attractiveness and to feelings of sexual deprivation, she may have erotic dreams that are stimulated by the increased blood flow to the vaginal area, the swelling and sensations that become stronger in the genitals as her pregnancy progresses.

Joan may have dreamed about the masterful magician for one of these reasons. She might also have been portraying sexual climax as a metaphor for the climax of bearing a baby. In her middle thirties, Joan had postponed childbearing to near the comfortable limit. Her husband, formerly married with several offspring, was not eager to add more. Joan might well not have expected this great touch to her life.

A few pregnant women dream of former lovers because something is missing in the romantic relationship with their husbands. Such dreams may even indicate unfinished business with a youthful love. Few married women maintain a liaison with a lover while pregnant; the sensual dreams of those who do may express a wish to be with him more often. Unmated mothers-to-be understandably yearn for a supportive, affectionate relationship; their dreams may provide compensation. Sexual dreams in the pregnant woman may also be a response to the increased fullness in her genitals.

Mostly, however, erotic dreams during pregnancy simply offer the comforting reassurance, "Don't worry. You see, you are sexy, alluring, and lovable."

**The "Other Woman" Beckons.** Sometimes the expectant mother finds herself tortured by nightmares that her husband is having a love affair. Or she may picture strange women propositioning her man.

Such dreams also express a sense of insecurity about holding the husband's love and attention through a time of great change. The pregnant woman has a realistic sense of vulnerability. She is more dependent than ever upon the goodwill and support of those around her, especially her husband's. She may fear his loss.

Unfortunately, for a few women these fears prove true, as they did for the heroine of Nora Ephron's autobiographical novel *Heartburn*<sup>24</sup>. The husband, who frequently feels neglected while the wife is preoccupied with their forthcoming child, sometimes chooses to philander during his wife's pregnancy. Needing attention, he seeks it elsewhere. Under such circumstances the pregnant woman faces a complicated situation that usually requires professional help.

For most women, happily, the insecurity is unfounded and passes. In fact many women find that going through the experience of preparing for and giving birth to a child bonds her and her husband in a deep way. Those pregnant women who understand the husband's tendency to feel neglected will find ways to include him in preparations for parenting.

### *The Husband as Helper or Handicap*

Every couple has mixed feelings about each other. A woman and man living in daily intimacy are bound to have occasional conflicts that have repercussions in their dreams. When they are feeling intimate and loving, this, too, finds dream expression.

Most of the time the pregnant woman's mate is simply present in her dreams. The participants in Maybruck's study depicted their husbands in 24 percent of their dreams; usually they were merely on the scene, neither actively helping nor harassing.<sup>25</sup> Joan's husband, for example, appeared in 27 percent of her thirty-three pregnancy dreams.

**Excess Baggage.** In most of these dreams Joan's husband simply accompanied her, as he did in a dream of visiting a bookstore, entitled "Here and Now." In an early pregnancy dream he assisted her:

I am lugging around heavy baggage, several items, and so is John [her husband]. I put one bag inside the other and offer this to John. He takes the doubled-up bag, thus lightening my load considerably.

Joan thought that taking over the extra bag might symbolize John's plan to take over the whole wage-earning "burden" for several months after the baby was born. Here the baggage, which often refers to weight gain in pregnant women's dreams, appears to refer more to financial burden. Joan's husband was to carry a "double load," and she felt grateful.

**Clutching Her Purse.** In a few dreams Joan's husband evoked ambivalent responses or outright anger and misery. At the end of one of these,

... Later I am wandering around dark streets, clutching my purse. I meet John again in a bar under the theater. He tries to explain what is happening in his head, but I cannot listen. I am crying too much. I wake in deep sadness and frustration.

Joan must have been experiencing some tension in the relationship with her husband when she had this dream. Although her prevailing feeling is tearful distress-revealed in the fact that the environment was so dark and in her fear of losing her valuable purse-her husband did find her and tried to communicate. Actions of this sort reveal positive elements at work even in nightmares.

**Husband Sick and Dying.** Leah, when she was about five months pregnant, had some nightmares about her husband. In one,

My husband is dying of a dread disease. He has a really good attitude, very positive. I am sad for him, that he is going to die.

Then I realize it's contagious, and that means I will die, too, and so will the baby. I wake up with a terrible headache.

During the day Leah had been worried about her husband's safety while he was out sailing. On one level her dream probably reflected that waking concern. However, her husband was quite well, while Leah herself was experiencing some uncomfortable symptoms with her pregnancy.

At this time Leah was bothered by headaches at the end of each day's work. Her dreaming mind probably made an association between the discomfort that she was experiencing and the idea of fatal illness. In their caricature mode, dreams sometimes liken pregnancy to a disease. Soon Leah depicted herself as the one who was ill.

**Sick and Unloved.** A week or so later Leah commented, "The last two nights I've had dreams that were so bad, I didn't want to write them down." All she could remember of one was:

My husband doesn't want me anymore. I am sick and he doesn't care. It doesn't matter to him.

Leah went on to explain, I woke up feeling miserable. I don't recall the details now because I didn't record them, but the feeling was awful, like I used to feel when I broke up with a boyfriend."

**Husband Goes Berserk.** In yet another dream of the same time period Leah dreamed:

My husband is a crazy person. He talks about killing people. I don't believe him, at first, then I do. We live in the house my parents lived in. Here I am with this maniac, but he has a dependency on me. I know he won't hurt me, but I can't react like I want and tell him to get away. I have to sneak out, and he comes after me.

These dreams sound on the surface as though Leah's husband is behaving badly toward her. In fact he was loving and patient. It was she who was extremely sensitive, in need of abundant attention, and finding herself yelling at him to reduce her tension. She felt pressed and resisted going to work; there were demands she had to respond to and didn't want to deal with. The house in her dream is one associated with a difficult aspect of adolescence, thus a fitting setting for a disturbed dream.

When a person attributes to other people behavior and feelings that originate in the self, psychologists term this attribution projection. People often project in their dreams as well as when awake. Leah is dreaming of her husband as sick or in trouble, when it is she herself who is distressed.

**In Big Trouble.** This explanation became clear in Leah's case because a couple of nights later she dreamed:



I am Oliver North's assistant. I am in a room full of high school people, in a cafeteria. I am eating and looking through North's papers. On a stage there is a skit taking place, but nobody is paying attention. The players say, "Look, you have to pay attention " But nobody does, so they stop. North shows me all this s\_\_t I have to sort out, things to unravel. The entertainment is mad. They want to be appreciated, but I have to unravel the problems of life.

Here Leah is expressing her need for attention and her difficulty in handling things more directly. Oliver North and the Iran-Contra hearings were much in the news at the time of this dream. Leah's main association to North was, "He's in big trouble." She went on to elaborate. "He screwed up. I feel a little compassion for him because he's taking the brunt. He has to keep a lot of things organized and sorted." Each dreamer, of course, would have his or her own associations.

For Leah, North in her dream symbolizes a person in trouble who has to "unravel life problems." Casting herself in the role of his assistant in this dream, she must work to organize and sort everything out. High school was not a happy place for her. In her dream language, then, Leah is saying, "I can't even focus on the entertaining part of being pregnant (the skit). I have to deal with too many complexities (the paperwork). I'm in big trouble (like North is). I want people to give me their attention and recognize my situation."

These two themes-being ill and being in trouble-are only one side to Leah's pregnancy dreams, as we will see. When she feels pressed, overtired, and fed up with work, themes of being in trouble arise: when she has headaches or other unpleasantness from her pregnancy, dreams of illness are likely to occur; when she feels sensitive and neglected, ambivalent dreams about her husband unfold. Yet there are other times when her dreams are full of happy expectation. Dreams show our momentary moods.

Other pregnant women in my study portrayed conflicts with their husbands by storms, natural disasters, or other catastrophes. The expectant mother needs to keep in mind that dreams overdramatize; a small fuss with a mate can cause a dream earthquake. The images in dreams depict how the dreamer feels at a moment in time. The following night can be full of joyful imagery.

In positive dreams about husbands, pregnant women saw themselves being rescued from danger by him, helped over obstacles, or being treated with great tenderness and affection.

If you are pregnant, you can expect your dreams to echo all the nuances of your constantly changing relationship to your spouse. Being pregnant brings out special needs. Your dreams will show you where your feelings about your husband are at the moment, reveal areas that need working on together, and sometimes soothe and nurture you when you most need loving care. Sharing dreams with your husband can be a good way to stay in close communication about your emotions as you go through the experience of pregnancy side by side.

### *Whose Life Is This, Anyhow? Relationships With Mothers*

**The Dreamer Gains Control From Mother.** When a woman becomes pregnant, old emotions about her mother resurface-anger, affection, guilt, jealousy, dependence, and the need to be a separate individual. At the same time, especially during her first pregnancy, a woman begins to experience directly what her own mother has gone through to produce her. She gains a new appreciation of what is involved in bearing and raising a child.

In some ways, therefore, the expectant mother feels more understanding and tolerant of her mother; in other ways former resentments reawaken. Her mother becomes the model to react against or to copy. The mother-to-be may still feel like a child herself; she may fear being overwhelmed, inadequate, or too immature to have a child.

Pregnant women dream about their mothers according to their various feelings about them. Good mothers, bad mothers, and indifferent mothers abound in dreams. Fathers occasionally make dream appearances at this time, too, but their role is less striking, probably because they

are less of a role model. Van de Castle estimates that in the dreams of pregnant women a ratio of five mothers appear to every one father.<sup>26</sup>

Maybruck found that her pregnant subjects dreamed about their mothers in 14 percent of their dreams,<sup>27</sup> a somewhat lower percentage than most studies report. The roles that the mother played varied from being confidante and helper to being an outright villain. She observed that her subjects who had mothers living nearby were more likely to dream about their mothers as allies; those whose mothers lived farther away tended to have more anxiety-provoking dreams about their mothers.

**In Control of the Steering Wheel.** Some pregnant women dream of their mothers in different roles on different nights, as Joan did. In one dream she was a young child; her mother let her down, leaving her deeply disappointed and bitter. In another dream her mother helped her prepare food and take out the trash. In yet another dream Joan displayed a discernible shift in her ability to cope regardless of what her mother did:

I am in a small plane with Mother flying over the Hawaiian islands/Columbia River. She is at the controls. I tell her to fly more slowly, but she speeds up instead. Finally I gain control of the plane and I turn it around.

The person at the steering wheel of dream vehicles always indicates the aspect the dreamer feels is "in control" of life at the moment. Joan might have been dreaming about her actual mother or of the "mother quality" within herself. In either case she has made rapid strides in sensing her capability. From the "disappointed child" of an earlier dream, she has become "pilot" in control of a plane. She has actively succeeded in achieving her needs and determining her own direction, instead of passively accepting her mother's control and feeling frustrated. Dream behavior of this kind suggests a corresponding growth in maturity.

On the whole, when pregnant women dream about their mothers, they are trying to find an answer to the question "How much do I want to be like my mother?" The mother serves as a role model to rage against, to emulate, or to modify-

**The Flying Pogo Stick.** The whole issue of being in control of one's life becomes important to the pregnant woman-whether or not her mother appears directly in her dreams. Leah, for example, pregnant for the first time in her early thirties, was about five months along when she dreamed:

I am at a beach where there are lots of people. I see something and very intentionally walk toward it, making my way through the people and kids. It is a mechanism, a kind of pogo stick, with a place to put my hands and a place to stand on. I step onto it and begin to move it around to get the *feel* of how to operate the mechanism.

Then I am flying up in the air. People, kids, are below me playing. I see houses right by the water, people working, a lot of activity. At first it's kind of adventurous feeling. I'm interested in looking at all that's going on below. I see a client I had a lot of trouble with milling around on the beach. Birds are flying on the same mechanism.

Then I observe I'm getting way too high and I feel scared. I don't quite know how to operate it. I call out, screaming. My husband shakes me awake.

Leah went on to draw me a picture of this flying pogo stick and explain the very delicate, vulnerable mechanism that operated it. At first she was having fun in her dream, perhaps corresponding to the adventure of pregnancy. She was rising above her problems, represented by the troublesome client left behind on the beach. However, she soon felt she was moving too high, into an area where she didn't "know how to operate," and she panicked. Pregnancy can give many a first-time mother the feeling that things are out of their control. Luckily many gain confidence in the process, as Joan did,

taking over the controls from her mother. For many women pregnancy becomes a final step in the process of growing up.

During the second trimester, therefore, many of the pregnant woman's dreams center around the following:

<i>Dream Image</i>	<i>Probable Stimulus</i>
Animals	Awareness, concerns about unborn child
Her husband	Mirror of ever-changing relationship
Her mother	Old conflicts; new hopes for own motherhood
At a steering wheel	Wishing to be in control of her life

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....

### **The Expectant Father's Dreams During the Second Trimester**

**The Family Ghost.** At the same time that the mother-to-be is dreaming about the topics listed above, the expectant father's dreams are becoming less dominated by sexuality and more protective and nurturing. Nat, the husband of one of the participants in my study, was very involved with his wife's pregnancy; during her second trimester, he dreamed:

I am sitting talking to my [deceased] grandmother, who is reclining on a couch. I tell her all about the baby. I notice how very thin my grandmother is, a skeleton with just light skin over her bones. It's okay. I know she is dead. It feels good to tell her about the baby.

In the same way that being pregnant stirs up a woman's feelings about her parents, the expectant father may find himself thinking and dreaming about his family of origin. In this case Nat wishes his beloved grandmother were able to share in the new development in his life—the continuity of her family.

**Giant Lobsters and Alligators.** Larry may have been feeling more threatened by the impending birth of his wife's baby. When Eva was about twenty weeks pregnant, Larry dreamed:

I'm in a market. The store manager is in a wheelchair. In a big tank, twelve-foot lobsters are being kept. Suddenly a twelve-foot gator jumps out of the tank and leaps eight feet in the air.

The alligator, Larry told me, is a "slithery, unpredictable reptile with big teeth." Animals with big teeth, we have said previously, usually represent a threat of danger. The store manager, confined to a wheelchair, was described as a person who "should be in control, but is not." The tank containing the aquatic creatures probably represented the womb containing the fetus. Larry's imagery suggests he was coping with some angry feelings at the time of the dream. It was undoubtedly he, symbolized by the store manager, who felt out of control of the situation. Perhaps his dream was expressing momentary unvoiced resentment about the forthcoming baby because the same night Eva had a very happy dream.

**The Pregnant Father.** In a dream when his wife was six months along, Nat saw himself being pregnant and giving birth:

I am nine months pregnant. I feel a drip of water on my ankle and say, "Oh, it's time to go to the hospital."

Next I am in the hospital, on a bed with my legs up in the air, relaxed, with no pain. But the baby is right at the exit, and I can't get it out. I give it back to Sonny [his wife]. She has to take over.

Obviously Nat identified with his wife. He recognized her unique role as childbearer, yet wanted to share the experience.

Expectant fathers often feel left out at this stage of their wife's pregnancy. More than half of Siegel's subjects dreamed of being excluded and alone.<sup>28</sup> Dreams like Nat's can help bridge the gap. Confiding troublesome dreams with one's mate can overcome feelings of loneliness and keep partners in touch, while trading happy dreams can increase confidence and intimacy.

### **The Third Trimester of Pregnancy: Dreams of Babies and Journeys**

#### *Dream Babies: The Unborn Child's Gender, Looks, and Personality*

"What will my child be like? A boy? A girl? Will my baby resemble me or someone else in my family? What name will be right?" These and similar questions fill the minds of parents-to-be.

Modern methods such as amniocentesis may unveil some of the mystery of the unborn child for a few pregnant women, but expectant mothers still have much material to dream about regarding the infant in their wombs. Researcher Robert Gillman analyzed the dreams of forty-four pregnant women, comparing them to the dreams of a group of non-pregnant college women. He found that 40 percent of the pregnant women dreamed about babies, whereas only one percent of the non-pregnant group did so.<sup>29</sup> Such dreams about the child may begin as early as conception; they tend to accelerate during the last trimester.

#### ***Pink, Blue, or Yellow Booties?***

The pregnant woman is making many decisions during the final three months of her term. She is usually preparing clothing, choosing a layette, and setting up an area for her baby with crib and changing table. Choices between pink for girls and blue for boys or "unisex" yellow or white or pale green must be made.

Some mothers feel quite certain of the sex of their forthcoming child based upon their dreams. Meg, at forty-one, was sure that her child would be a girl because her dreams were filled with dancing, quite different from her earlier pregnancy with a boy; she later birthed a girl. Mindy, at twenty-nine, dreamed from the outset that her first baby was a boy. So did her husband. During the first trimester he dreamed:

I am at work when an announcement comes over the loudspeaker saying that Mindy has just given birth to a boy, so I'm a father. I feel really happy.

This couple was obviously in tune with their wishes; sure enough, their dreams of a son came true.

Lucy, however, was equally certain that she would birth a boy. Already the mother of two girls, she wished to complete her family with a male. Throughout her pregnancy she dreamed of having

a boy; she also carried the weight of her unborn child more to the front, unlike her former pregnancies, giving her the impression-from folklore-that her child would be a son. Two weeks after having given birth, she smilingly told me, Well, I was wrong. It's another girl!"

Sometimes the pregnant mother's dreams about the sex of her child are vague. Maggie, in her thirties, described this dream she had when eight months pregnant with her first child:

I am running in a meadow and feeling ecstatic. It is an idyllic scene-my dream of motherhood. I wear a flowing gown. I can see the back of my child skipping before me happily. I can't tell from the back whether it is a boy or a girl. I always want to know, but it is usually masked in my dreams.

In an effort to verify how frequently pregnant women correctly sensed the sex of their unborn child, Maybruck asked her subjects about predictive dreams.<sup>30</sup> She found that 50 percent of the expectant mothers whose dreams she investigated had accurately dreamed of the baby's sex. Since the chances of having a child of either sex are also fifty-fifty, these subjects-as a group-predicted no better than chance. A few pregnant women, however, had highly prophetic dreams. These involved details of their labor or delivery, such as going into labor early, the exact date of a premature labor, being put into a community labor room, the specific circumstances under which the waters broke, having an unplanned cesarean section, developing toxemia, and so forth. It would seem that at least some women have a keen ability to anticipate their future.

### *The Face of the Unborn*

Pregnant women, Maybruck found, see their babies in about 15 percent of their dreams.<sup>31</sup> Other researchers have reported an even greater number of baby dreams during the third trimester. Sometimes the expectant mother depicts the appearance of her forthcoming child with surprising accuracy. Ginny, for instance, commented,

I give birth to a baby daughter with black curly hair like her father and blue eyes like mine.

Ginny went on to explain that she did give birth to a daughter looking exactly like the baby in her dream. Later, when the girl was older, her hair changed to straight brown hair like her mother's and her eyes darkened to brown like her father's. Some mothers-to-be worry in their dreams that the child might inherit an undesirable characteristic. Donna's concern was that the child in her womb might have his father's eyes, one of which wanders. She dreamed:

The baby is born and he has bizarre eyes. It is very frightening.

Not long afterward Donna gave birth to a son with perfect eyesight. She had been expressing a waking fear in her dreams. In his study of the dreams of mothers-to-be, Gillman found that 12 percent of his pregnant group dreamed of crippled and deformed infants; most of these women had feelings of apprehension in their dreams.<sup>32</sup> Among Maybruck's pregnant subjects, 40 percent of their dreams were nightmares.<sup>33</sup> Pregnant women can take comfort in the fact that nightmares are typical during this time and rarely contain prophetic material. Cassie, when she did not yet know she was pregnant, dreamed:

I give birth to a baby girl. Her eyes are round like mine, but the shape goes downward, like my husband's. She looks peculiar.

In fact Cassie had just conceived when she had this dream. She actually wanted to have a girl, but worried that it would resemble her husband, since, she believed, girls often favor the father, boys, the mother. Her husband's looks, she told me, would be better for a boy. This dreamer, too, was undoubtedly picturing her concern.

Leah anticipated the appearance of her child with more delight:

I'm having a sonogram [something she had already done]. Instead of being all cloudy like it is, it's absolutely clear, like Kodak film, in color. I can see our baby girl, and she looks just like us. She has my eyes, all dark and sparkly, and my husband's cute little bow mouth. She is a mixture of us in miniature. It's so thrilling!

Like most mothers-to-be, Leah had been wondering what the baby will be and what it would look like. In another dream of the same night she saw herself playing with her baby, who this time was a boy she was dressing in cute clothes. Dreams offer a chance to check out one's child in imagination.

Some pregnant women seem to have extrasensory communication with the child in their womb. Such dreams are less frequent than the common dream themes of pregnancy, yet when they arise, they are emotionally powerful.

Jill, for example, pregnant for the first time, dreamed that the child crawled out of her womb. The tiny creature capered around her mother's body playfully, then, like a baby kangaroo returning to its pouch, went back into the womb. Jill felt she had experienced a direct contact with her child.

Leah tried saying to herself, "I want to communicate with my child," as she was falling asleep. She imagined a big building, a medieval church or school. She saw a little girl standing outside in a costume, a kind of brown robe. The child was about four years old, with straight bangs, brown hair, in a short pixie cut with a slight wave.

Leah continued speaking to her drowsy self, "I want to see that," and brought the picture in closer:

"Yes, I'm your daughter," the girl said. I feel happy about it. "My brother's coming soon," said the child. "Not too soon, I hope," I replied. I was afraid to ask her about twins.

Leah told me that when she began this imaginary process of communication with her baby, she was conscious but by the end that she was asleep and dreaming. The decision to interact was deliberate; the imagery seemed to run on its own. Leah had earlier dreamed about having twins, and her physician suggested this possibility, hence her concern in the dream. She eventually gave birth to an adorable daughter.

Pregnant women who are curious about their child might enjoy setting up a dream as Leah did to see what happens. Another woman who was already the mother of twins told me that throughout the pregnancy she kept dreaming of things in pairs or doubles. She was aware of the fact that twins were forthcoming. It would be intriguing to investigate whether there is imagery characteristic of women about to give multiple birth.

Among the women in Maybruck's study, a few reported dreams in which their stomach became transparent so that the mother-to-be could look inside.<sup>34</sup> Like Leah observing her baby in a clear sonogram, the dreamer could observe the face of her unborn child. Such dreams left the woman with a feeling of deep joy and serenity.

### *Name, Name, Who's Got the Name?*

Pregnant women spend many waking hours contemplating possible names for their forthcoming babies. Harmonious fits to the last name are weighed as carefully as the child's future education. Family names and fashionable ones are tried on for sound; parents consider how a given name may be susceptible to teasing or to a sense of uniqueness in the years ahead. Meanwhile, in sleep, dreams suggest, and sometimes demand, other choices.

Convinced that her unborn child was a boy, Bettine selected her favorite name: Benjamin. Her dreams thought otherwise. The night she had made her final decision, she dreamed she held her baby in her arms. Suddenly he spoke to her, saying, "Mornmy, please don't name me Benjamin. Please!" Needless to say, Bettine awoke somewhat shaken. When she eventually gave birth to a baby boy,

she decided to call him Christopher instead. Although she still preferred the name Benjamin, she hesitated to go against such strongly expressed wishes, from wherever they derived.

Kit, who was pregnant with her first child when we spoke, dreamed of having a baby girl who announced to her, "My name is Shannon." Awake, she confided, "It's a pretty name, though I never would have thought of it. Maybe I should name her Shannon if it's a girl." Kit did in fact birth a little girl. She named her child Jenna, which was not too dissimilar from her dream name.

When Sue was pregnant with her first baby, she had struggled under the double handicap of severe financial problems combined with the discovery of her husband's unfaithfulness. This strain brought her near the breaking point. One night in her distress, Sue knelt at the bedside to pray for help. When she retired, she dreamed:

I give birth to a baby boy. He tells me that his name is Jesus Christ.

Sue felt comforted by this dream. By the time her child was born, she had forgotten this dream and christened the little boy Jeremy Clark, using family names that she liked. Months later, in reading over her journals, she encountered her dream. Startled, she realized that she had used the same initials, J.C., for her child's name. Her dream baby may have symbolized the birth of her hope.

Although Sue's marriage eventually collapsed and she endured many difficulties before remarrying happily, her son remained a source of solace. A grown man today, she describes him as "very spiritual," in the mode of his dream introduction.

In olden times American Indians regarded names given in a dream as having "power." Today's parents, too, often find that names arising in a dream hold special resonance for them.

### *Archetypal Dreams*

Some pregnant women nearing their due date find their dreams taking on a mystical character. The word *archetype* derives from the Greek word *arch*, meaning "chief." It was originally used by Plato to describe ideal forms thought to exist in the mind of God. Centuries later Jung used the word in his psychology to indicate "Inherited tendencies of the human mind to form representations of mythological motifs."<sup>35</sup> Dreams with archetypes impart a feeling of awe to the dreamer.

**Baby From an Ancient Couple.** Jayne Gackenbach-Snyder, former president of the Association for the Study of Dreams, for example, told me that when she was almost eight months pregnant, she dreamed:

There is a young couple who are virgins, and they wend down to the river, where he kisses her. As I watch all this, I see the images of an older couple. They are from an ancient culture, perhaps Egyptian. They have a baby and they put their baby into the young woman. I don't know if the young man and woman make love or not.

Then it is twenty years later, and I am taking part in the dream. I am on some sort of world council—we need to decide whether or not to change Easter from the day it is to a new day that the populace wants. The new day is the birthday of the infant....

A spaceship is collecting information on the configuration of the planets and stars to deliver to the council in pictures. I am to get it and deliver it to the council.

The rest of the dream is taken up with this attempt. People keep trying to steal the film from me. It is in film canisters in a clear liquid that when you put something in it, you can't see there is something in it.

In Jayne's multifaceted dream, she supported the decision to change the date of Easter. [The word *Easter*, by the way, derives from the name of the Anglo-Saxon goddess of spring, *Eostre*.<sup>36</sup> ] *Jayne's dreaming mind felt that she was participating in an event of universal import—a kind of resurrection. As a creator of a new life, she may even have felt goddess-like herself.*

*Familiar symbols of pregnancy overflow: the spaceship, as well as the canister of film, probably represent the expectant mother's body; the clear liquid is likely to symbolize the amniotic fluid in which the fetus floats—as yet undeveloped, like the precious film. Jayne, in addition to her demanding post as a university professor, editor of several books on lucid dreaming and role as former president of the Association for the Study of Dreams, does photographic work, so the film in her dream is a symbol from everyday life.*

*The archetypal flavor of this dream comes from the young virgins, the couple from the ancient culture who give the child as a gift to the young woman, the configuration of the planets and stars, and the idea of changing the date of the "rebirth" of Christ to the birthday of the infant. This dream left Jayne with a special feeling of being part of a sacred rite.*

**Gift of the Precious Cradle.** Leah had a similar experience during her third trimester, when she dreamed of a "metaphysical delivery person" from outer space who brought her an expandable cradle worth \$2,500:

... First I tell him I don't want it. I didn't order it. He explains It is really special. It converts into a dining room table and a china cabinet. He begins to sway me. I need more space for dishes. Also I feel sorry for him, for all the trouble he's gone to. I write him a check for \$210, adding extra for the delivery. It really was coincidental. He just didn't have my name right.

Leah really enjoyed this dream. She had had several earlier dreams about bassinets decorated with skirts; these were usually small, inadequate ones one the size to hold a cat, one that was a soap dish, one a shoe. In waking life she had already purchased an expensive designer crib, so her dream was speaking symbolically. As we discussed these images, it emerged that they represented for Leah the small "space" in her life that had been allotted for her baby. So far, work had taken up most of her time. She wanted to have greater room to concentrate on her pregnancy. The "metaphysical delivery person" in her dream brought her exactly what she needed—more space for the baby.

The expandable cradle opened up into a dining room table that Leah defined as a place for families, a place to receive nourishment, to gather around to communicate. A china cabinet was, in addition to being something she needed, "a place where fine things are kept." Dishes, an item Leah loves, are "used for providing the food we need. I have many beautiful dishes that were wedding gifts." The cradle in the dream was very costly, beyond what she could have afforded to order; the price she was charged was an amount she could manage without strain.

Putting these symbols together with the action in Leah's dream, we see that she was "coincidentally" receiving, along with her baby, the nourishment she so badly wanted: she was creating a family that would increase communication and provide for her needs. Her dream seemed to be giving her permission to expand the role of her forthcoming child, as if it were a valuable gift from another time and space.

Just as the dreams of holy mothers, which were described earlier, inspired the dreamer to feel that her child would make a special contribution to his or her world, so, too, modern women reenacting the childbirth ritual of time immemorial may feel significance in their pregnancy dreams. They are participating in an event of monumental import in their lives.

### ***The Final Weeks of Pregnancy: Destination Unknown***

During the last weeks before her term ends, the pregnant woman turns inward. Her obsession with the forthcoming child becomes all consuming. Withdrawing her attention from those around her is essential preparation for the task ahead: birthing a child. It requires all her concentration to gather inner strength. For she is truly alone.



The woman about to give birth to her first child is face to face with the unknown. There is no way out now. No one can do it for her; she cannot call in sick; she cannot make an excuse; she cannot plead prior commitment. She must labor and bring forth to become complete-woman with child. Small wonder the prospect shakes an otherwise mature and skilled adult.

In olden days the risk was far worse. But even with modern methods and loving support, childbirth often seems overwhelming. So, for a multitude of expectant mothers, dreams of journeys arise.

**Foreign Travel Required.** Five days before Cheryl gave birth to her son, she dreamed:

There are two mixtures of dreams, and they come out as one. In one of the dreams Bill [her husband] is getting onto a bus. He comes and tells me, "Some woman keeps trying to sit next to me." I reply, "Well, tell her to go away!"

In the other dream that is happening at the same time, I am boarding a plane, going off to a foreign country somewhere. I am pregnant but not so much as I am. I have a bad feeling, like I don't really want to go. I am not an exile. People are escorting me. I have to go, but it is not for long.

On the plane are all these movie people, not superstars but people you recognize from adventure stories. It is confusing, like *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. They are talking about scripts. There are these things that look half like people and half like apes. Both dreams go on at once.

Cheryl's double dream expresses an emotion women typically experience toward the end of gestation: reluctance to confront the unknown. For a first-time mother, giving birth is rather like a journey to a foreign country. Face to face with her own adventure, she has an important starring role, even though it is with reluctance, since she must go alone. The fact that Cheryl knows she is "not an exile" in the dream and that the trip is "not for long" suggests that her attitude is basically positive and that she expects to return safely.

The half-person/half-ape creatures aboard the airplane undoubtedly represent the unborn fetus. The airplane itself can be seen symbolically as the enclosing womb, the "mother ship" where this dreamer's adventure and confusion take place.

Simultaneously Cheryl's husband is on a trip, too. But the dream likens his journey to a bus ride rather than an airplane flight, underscoring the difference in their roles, or "scripts," at this stage. Cheryl's associations to the annoying woman who kept trying to sit next to her husband led her to comment on the reduction of sex during the last few weeks to avoid injury to the baby. At almost nine months pregnant, she was sensitively attuned to wanting her husband's complete attention. Although their journeys are of a different nature, they are parallel.

**No Substitute.** Joan depicted the common journey theme of the last trimester in a different way. When she was six and a half months pregnant, Joan recorded the last entry in her dream journal prior to the birth of her daughter:

I am offered a chance to go to Hawaii for one or two weeks with two friends and my sister. I queue up in the Seattle line, while they stand in the Portland line. Just at the last minute I remember that I am committed twice a week to teaching a geometry class. Thinking it would be impossible to find a substitute, and not right to just cancel class, I decline the chance to go. It would be nice, but the timing is not right.

For Joan, who travels frequently to Hawaii in her waking life, the trip is seen as a pleasurable distraction from work. Here she makes the decision to keep her commitment to do a job. It is too late to cancel.

The pregnant woman who accepts that no one can act as a substitute for her in childbearing, that there is no longer a way Out, that she must do it herself—that woman has reached a milestone in becoming a mature woman.

Giving birth, in addition to being depicted as a journey or an important commitment, may be represented as traveling through tunnels and corridors or the bursting of great waters.

**The Waiting Game.** Sonny, in a dream reported only three days before her son was born, anticipated the pleasures of being able to have and hold her child:

In the dream we have had the baby two days ago. I have gone somewhere while Nat [her husband] is taking care of the baby. He's taken it to a sporting event, with a bunch of his buddies.

I go to the stadium. It is a beautiful, sunny day. There is a combination football and baseball game going on. One team wears bright red uniforms and the other yellow.

I walk up the bleachers, and Nat tells me where the baby is. I look behind where there is a cabanalike arrangement with three babies. It is easy to pick out mine. It is time to feed the child, and so I nurse it. I think that I must ask Nat how the labor went. He comes in. The whole dream has a feeling of great happiness.

Sonny said that this dream left her with a marvelous aftertaste of joy. "We had had the baby and adjusted. Nat and the baby were able to function without me, and yet I was important and needed to feed it."

There is much symbolism in this involved dream of Sonny's, but the main points here are the sensation of joy at having finished childbirth, and the complex game. Sonny explained that she likes football and knows a lot about it. Baseball she sees as boring; it takes a long time before anything happens. Thus the combination is something with interesting elements but that requires a lot of waiting before there is any action, just as pregnancy does. The ball in the game probably represents the fetus, whose motion will determine the end of the "waiting game." Being nine months pregnant, Sonny expresses here a wish for her baby's arrival and the pleasure she anticipates. The game is not over, and the outcome remains unknown.

### ***Trial Runs***

Sometimes the pregnant woman depicts labor and delivery directly, instead of in symbols. Such dreams often give vent to fears or hopes for the forthcoming experience.

Giving birth to a child today is far safer than it was during the last century, when many women died from infections. Nonetheless, the first-time mother goes into the unfamiliar experience with a degree of trepidation. Some women develop extreme fear of the possibility of pain during labor, not realizing that they can learn to reduce (or even, some say, eliminate) discomfort by training.

The experienced mother may find labor dreams realistic, yet not be alarmed. Bonnie, for instance, was seven months pregnant with her second child when she had a lucid dream:

I begin going into labor in my own bed. There are no doctors or hospital. Feels so real. "Oh, my God," I think. "I'm in labor. I don't want to go into labor now. It's almost three months too early." Then I realize I'm dreaming, and it changes from a real sensation to a more dreamlike one. It isn't painful, just routine. The dream continues, and the baby is born. My husband isn't there until the end.

Bonnie thinks that she was experiencing "false labor" pains, which triggered her extremely realistic dream. Indeed it may be that labor dreams are stimulated in part by the periodic

tightening of the uterus during sleep. These contractions are the so-called Braxton-Hicks contractions, which are believed to strengthen uterine muscles in preparation for labor.<sup>37</sup>

A research team headed by Ismet Karacan recently demonstrated that healthy young women who are not pregnant have rhythmic contractions of the uterus during REM sleep.<sup>38</sup> They found that the uterus contracted from one to three times each minute. Contractions during REM were more often than during any other sleep stage, especially deep sleep, and they were also more numerous than during the waking state. This constant activity of the uterus may be a kind of exercise to prepare it to meet the demands of menstruation, reproduction, and labor. Researchers also think that these contractions keep the uterus healthy, preventing atrophy, because their frequency decreases after menopause.

Compared with the non-pregnant woman, the pregnant woman has even stronger regular contractions of her uterus, which intensify toward the end of her term; it is these contractions that probably stimulate the woman's dreams of childbirth. Most of the pregnant women in my study reported dreams of labor during the last trimester.

**Dress Rehearsal.** The pregnant woman's dreams of labor may help prepare her by a kind of rehearsal. Such dreams are a sort of "practice run" for the physical separation of mother and child at birth. Pregnant women can accelerate the positive effect of their dreams, as we will see. Early in her pregnancy, delivery is often visualized in the expectant mother's dreams as a baby who "pops out" the way Mindy's and Donna's did. Later on, her dream scenarios about delivery are more realistic, sometimes outright terrifying. The pregnant woman who understands what can be done about these can actually benefit from dreams of childbirth. Researchers find that women who are assertive or even aggressive when they are threatened in nightmares have a different, and usually more positive, childbirth experience than those who remain passive victims.

When a pregnant woman is having a nightmare, she can react in one of two main ways: she can accept the threat, allowing herself to be victimized by the villain or danger confronting her; or she can assertively stand her ground. This self-assertive behavior may range from simply refusing to be victimized, to yelling, to aggressively counterattacking, to outsmarting, to befriending the dream villain. The key element is action.

**Taking Action.** By becoming an active participant in the dream, the expectant mother mobilizes her resources. Maybruck, a childbirth educator who currently runs a consulting service in San Francisco for pregnant women, advises her clients to behave assertively in their nightmares.<sup>39</sup> She also tells groups that she leads on the topic of preparing for childbirth to suggest to themselves before sleep, "Even if I have a nightmare, I will not be victimized." Actually writing down, before going to bed, "I will not be victimized in my dreams tonight," helps imprint this intention. Guidelines for dreaming such as these can profoundly effect the dream plot, especially when reinforced by discussion with peers.

These concepts are based on Maybruck's findings in her study of pregnant women. After the participants in this study had given birth, Maybruck observed the length of each woman's labor and placed her in one of two groups: those who had labor of ten hours or less and those who had labor of eleven hours or more. (Current estimates of average length of labor for a first-time mother are about twelve hours.) She noted that thirty-six of the women labored ten hours or less, while thirty labored eleven hours or more. One of her sixty-seven subjects, who had induced labor, was eliminated from these measures.

Nearly half (40 percent) of the over one thousand dreams reported by the pregnant subjects were nightmares—defined as a dream containing fear, terror, or physical or emotional pain.<sup>40</sup> In some of these nightmares the dreamer was victimized, in others she behaved assertively when threatened. Maybruck scored the nightmares as containing assertiveness or not, depending on whether the dreamer defended herself.

When short- and long-labor groups were compared to nightmares of being assertive or not, Maybruck found that there was a strong connection between the dream content and the length of labor. Among the women who had short labor, 94 percent had been assertive in at least one of their

nightmares. Among the women who had long labor, only 30 percent had been assertive, whereas the remaining 70 percent allowed themselves to be victimized. Self-assertion was connected with shorter labor.

**Breath of Life.** Of the women who participated in my study, Leah had a threatening labor dream just two days before her delivery:

I go into labor. I'm walking around the living room and I feel the baby's head come out. I reach down and pull it out. It's a little girl. The head is flesh and skin, but the body is just bones.

I'm worried. "This is not right." I blow on the baby or breathe on her, and she fills out to normal-looking. I'm still kind of concerned she will stay okay when I wake.

Although "blowing" or "breathing" on a newborn may be a simple behavior, the important fact is that Leah took action in her dream. In so doing, she transformed the dream baby. Subsequently she gave birth to her first child—a girl—in a short, six-hour delivery.

Taking charge, having confidence in herself, and being in command may help a woman to cope with the job of giving birth to a child. If you are a pregnant woman who finds herself being threatened in a nightmare, you may find that, instead of letting yourself be victimized, assertively reacting to the situation will make a profound difference. Not only will you feel better about your nightmare, you may actually help make your labor shorter and easier.

In an earlier study, researchers Carolyn Winger and Frederic Kapp reported that women with anxious nightmares about childbirth seemed to have shorter labor.<sup>41</sup> In retrospect, perhaps it was primarily those women who were active in their nightmares who had shorter labor. We cannot be sure, because exact dream content was not recorded in this study, only the presence or absence of nightmares.

The whole issue of taking action in nightmares is extremely important, especially to the pregnant woman, for whom a more active stance may be connected with shorter and easier labor. Hopefully future investigators will explore this issue with care and map it clearly.

Meanwhile the expectant mother has nothing to lose and potentially much to gain by becoming an active participant in her bad dreams. By telling herself before she falls asleep, "If I do have a nightmare, I will not be victimized. I will remember to cope with the threat," she may change her waking experience as well as her dreams. She can choose for herself the means to deal with danger in her dream. Some mothers prefer questioning the villain, instead of assertive counterattack, asking, "What do you want?" One theorist suggests surrounding the threatening image with golden light.<sup>42</sup> Whatever her mode of response, if the dreamer takes action to cope with the threatening dream figure, she may accomplish more than banishing her nightmare; she may help herself to function better in her task of labor.

During the last trimester, a pregnant woman prepares for the adventure of childbirth in dreams, including the following:

.....

*Dream Image*

*Probable Stimulus*

Large animals or buildings  
Newborn baby's appearance  
Communication with the fetus  
Great waters

The enlarged fetus  
Expectations or fears about baby  
Wish to know forthcoming child  
Anticipation of breaking of amniotic sac

Details of labor and delivery

Hopes or concerns about experience;  
actual early contractions

Journeys  
Rituals, ceremonies, holidays,  
birthdays, rites

Concern about the unknown  
Celebration of joy of birth

.....

### ***The Expectant Father's Dreams During the Third Trimester***

The father-to-be anticipates the birth of the child in his dreams, just as his pregnant wife does. The fathers- to be in Siegel's study often dreamed of finding babies or of being given them, sometimes during elaborate ceremonies or rites. While the woman may be dreaming of the work involved in her forthcoming labor, her mate may be concentrating on dream celebrations of the baby's birth. Dreams of this kind indicate acceptance and valuing of the child whose arrival is imminent.

Once again, sharing dreams during the last months of pregnancy gives a couple a unique way of staying in close contact with one another. Partners can better understand the feelings of their mates by hearing their dreams. Dream sharing can intensify their intimacy, making the adventure mutual.

### ***Does the Fetus Dream?***

While expectant mothers and fathers are dreaming throughout the pregnancy, expressing their hopes and fears for their developing baby, the fetus may be dreaming, too.

From the thirty-second week of pregnancy onward, tiny rapid eye movements (REM) can be monitored from the brain of the fetus. The brain of the unborn child is active during the third trimester, with slivers of memory being laid down. Scientists think the minute mind is exercising; it wakes and sleeps and has REM.

Of course we cannot say whether the fetus actually dreams during REM, but perhaps there are sensations of stretching legs and arms, or of sucking, or of hearing sounds reverberating through the watery environment.

Could the fetus already be in synchrony with the mother's dreams? We know from studies comparing nursing mothers with bottle-feeding ones that infants who breast-feed synchronize their sleeping and dreaming (or REM) cycles with their mothers'. Many a mother has noticed her nursling awaken just as she does.

Couples who are in close harmony tend to synchronize their sleep and dream cycles, too. In some families, mother, father, and baby may be dreaming together. Perhaps they are communicating in ways yet to be discovered.

### ***The "Golden Child": Symbolism in Dreams of Pregnancy***

Women who are pregnant frequently dream of giving birth to a child, but so do those who are not pregnant. Whence do such dreams emerge? What do they mean to the non-pregnant dreamer?

Sometimes the answer is that the non-pregnant woman is stimulated by ovulation. Donna, for instance, tells me that she always dreams about having a baby when she is ovulating, her wish to have another child being greatly enhanced by her current physical receptivity. A week later she feels much more practical, thinking of all the reasons it would be inadvisable to bear a second child at present. Many women, like Donna, dream of having a baby when their bodies are ripe to do so.

### ***Many Symbolic Meanings***

**Dream Pregnancy as an Escape.** Beyond the physiological basis of ovulation, dreams of being pregnant or of giving birth have a powerful symbolism.

The woman who has never delivered a child may dream persistently of this event as her "biological clock" runs out of time. A woman's capacity for childbearing is limited to roughly thirty years, from about age fifteen to forty-five, plus or minus five years at either end. It is well known in our culture that the risks escalate for the older mother carrying a first child. In their mid to latter thirties most women must make the decision to proceed if they are to experience motherhood. The question becomes "now or never."

Nina, who found herself facing this dilemma, had put off childbearing until she was at her outer biological limit. Having had a teenage abortion, she focused all her energy on a business career. In her late thirties she was a successful businesswoman. Recently a crisis had arisen at work that shook her to her dream roots. She had a violent argument with an employee, culminating in the need to fire the girl. That night Nina dreamed:

I am pregnant, about to have a baby. I don't have my bag packed, but I am not upset. I go to the store to buy a nightgown and other things for the hospital. I feel happy.

The pleasant emotional tone of the dream was partly compensation for the distress experienced in the daytime. Beyond this, the imagery suggests a need to prepare for an important new development. As we spoke, Nina said, "Maybe getting pregnant is a way to get out of this nightmare of business. It's a good excuse—the only one." It emerged that she had been in conflict about whether to quit business and have a baby or not. Thus the pregnancy in Nina's dream was partially an escape route.

One month later Nina's business problems had been resolved. The following month, she announced with twinkling eyes, "I'm pregnant!" Her dream had been more than a way out; it was also a reality. She had in fact been pregnant during the time of her dream without intending it, knowing it, or expecting it. Her dream was both symbolic (an escape from work) and realistic (she was pregnant).

Other women have described to me dreams of becoming pregnant when they had difficulty at work; these dreamers did not turn out to have conceived. Having a baby seems to remain in the back of women's minds as an alternative to a career situation when it becomes frustrating.

**Dream Pregnancy as Idea Development.** At times dreams of giving birth to a child do not represent a wish to do so nor a respectable means of escape from a difficult situation. Pregnancy and childbearing dreams can symbolize the "birth" of a new idea or project.

German sculptor and graphic artist Käthe Kollwitz recorded in her diary:<sup>44</sup>

I repeatedly dream that I again have a little baby and I feel all the old tenderness again—or rather more than that, for all the feelings in a dream are intensified.

It was a "very fine" period of her life when she was deeply engrossed in her work—her dream babies were probably art projects.

Val, a contemporary professional writer, who has never birthed a child, was hard at work on a major magazine piece when she dreamed of being pregnant; it was her "baby." Writers of both sexes have often likened their large-scale projects to the "gestation" of a child. A book grows from an inner fantasy to manifest form, one that requires laboring over, nurturing, and delivering. Creative artists in all fields compare their products in paint, stone, or song to their "children." The woman who undertakes an important project—mother or not—may well dream of her creative "child."

**The Divine Child.** For Jung, dreams of a child are archetypal.<sup>45</sup> The birth of a new potential within the dreamer, the potential of wholeness, the Self, the unity of opposites, a transformation of the personality—these are some of the terms Jungians have used to interpret the child in a dream. In

ancient alchemy the product of the elements mercury and sulfur formed, it was said, the philosophical gold or "golden child." Jung likened this to the divine child that appears in dreams.

From a biological point of view a child is truly the "union" of opposites of his or her parents. The mother and father, female and male, are brought together in a new way in their baby. Psychologically a child may symbolize reconciliation between two conflicting attitudes: spiritual versus material ideas, work versus play, love versus hate—such opposites may find a resolution that is symbolized by the dreamer as a newborn child.<sup>46</sup>

In the dreams of a woman who is not pregnant, a special child may symbolize the dreamer's inner development. Thus a woman may dream of giving birth to a child when she is undergoing a waking life change, as Miriam did just before her birthday:

I have a baby on my own, and she is so smart. She has her full intellect in four days. I am so proud of her. Miriam, who was not yet a mother, felt her life was changing in significant ways at the time of this dream; her bright baby was her own Inner growth.

Cheryl, several months after her son was born, dreamed of looking into a bedroom in her girlfriend's house:

The baby girl is lying on the bed playing with her toes. She is counting them. "One-two-three-four-five. They don't know I can talk! "

Cheryl, too, was discovering new capacities within herself in her role as mother and growing rapidly. The mystic child who speaks to us in dreams, who solves riddles, or who grants wisdom is the internal sign of healthy new potential.

Whenever a woman dreams of a child, new life stirs within her. Pregnant or not, mother or not, to dream of a miraculous child speaks of new life born within the dreamer.

<sup>1</sup> Ernest Hartmann, *The Biology of Dreaming* (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1967), p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> Julius Segal and Gay Gaer Luce, *Sleep* (New York: Arena Books, 1972), pp. 177-79. When researchers Gunnar Heuser and George Ling at the Brain Research Institute at UCLA injected cats with progesterone, the cats had unusually plentiful episodes of REM.

<sup>3</sup> E. Hartmann, *The Functions of Sleep* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 75.

<sup>4</sup> Ismet Karacan et al., "Sonic Implications of the Sleep Patterns of Pregnancy for Postpartum Emotional Disturbances," *British Journal of Psychiatry* 115 (1969): 929-35. A total of thirteen subjects were studied for eighty-five nights at the University of Florida: ten were followed through their late pregnancy and postpartum; three were studied during their entire pregnancy and postpartum. Comparing these subjects with a group of non-pregnant women, it was found that the pregnant women had a greater number of awakenings. The frequency of awakenings began to increase at the end of the second trimester.

The three subjects who were studied from early conception changed the amount they sleep during their pregnancy: they had their greatest total sleep time in the first trimester; sleep decreased in the second trimester, and fell below normal in the third trimester. The amount of deep sleep (stage 4) also decreased in the third trimester, but it increased during postpartum to the point where it was more even than what non-pregnant women had.

The amount of REM also changed during pregnancy. This research team found a slight increase in the number of REM periods in the second trimester; at the end of the second trimester REM decreased and continued decreasing during the third trimester. Overall, these

three subjects had less REM than non-pregnant women.

However, the investigators mention their study of a young woman whose ovaries had been removed; her REM was increased when estrogen was administered and her stage 4 (deep sleep) was suppressed with progesterone.

<sup>5</sup> Hartmann, *Functions of Sleep*, p. 147. In fact, extra dreaming may help consolidate the new learning.

<sup>6</sup> Described in Segal and Luce, *Sleep*, p. 177.

<sup>7</sup> The number of tusks on the dream elephant and other details of the dream vary according to the narrator of the account. For a version by Sir Edwin Arnold, see Carl G. Jung, *Symbols of Transformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), p. 320. For an illustration of Maya's dream, see David Coxhead and Susan Hiller, *Dreams: Visions of the Night* (New York: Avon, 1975), plate 37. Jung tells us that, according to a medieval tradition, Mary's conception of Jesus took place through her ear.

<sup>8</sup> Adam Bittleston, "Introduction" to Alexander Carmichael, *The Sun Dances: Prayers and Blessings From the Gaelic* (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 1960), p. xviii.

<sup>9</sup> **J. Kevin Thompson, "Larger Than Life," *Psychology Today* 20, no. 4 (April 1986): 38-44.**

<sup>10</sup> Thomas F. Cash, Barbara A. Winstead, and Louis H. Janda, "The Great American Shape-up," *Psychology Today* 20, no. 4 (April 1986): 30-37.

<sup>11</sup> Patricia Maybruck, "An Exploratory Study of the Dreams of Pregnant Women," Ph.D. diss., Saybrook University, San Francisco, 1986. For architectural symbols, see pp. 68-72.

<sup>12</sup> Maybruck, "Dreams of Pregnant Women," p. 68.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>14</sup> Patricia Monaghan, *The Book of Goddesses and Heroines* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1981), p. 60.

<sup>15</sup> Maybruck, personal communication, 1987.

<sup>16</sup> Robert Van de Castle, "Phases of Women's Dreams," paper presented to the Association for the Study of Dreams, Ottawa, Canada, June 1986.

<sup>17</sup> Maybruck, "Dreams of Pregnant Women," p. 102.

<sup>18</sup> Kendall Bradley Wood, "The Weird Dreams of Mothers-to-be: Psychologists Explain the Hidden Meanings," *Working Mother*, March 1987, p. 56. Wood describes the work of Alan Siegel on the dreams to expectant fathers.

<sup>19</sup> Robert L. Van de Castle, *The Psychology of Dreaming* (pamphlet) (New York: General Learning Corp., 1971), p. 38.

<sup>20</sup> Maybruck, "Dreams of Pregnant Women," p. 67. Although Maybruck reports figure of 18 percent in her dissertation, this percentage includes small children. With the children excluded, Maybruck (personal communication) tells me that 17 percent of her subjects dreamed of animals.



- <sup>21</sup> Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), pp. 75-76.
- <sup>22</sup> Maybruck, "Dreams of Pregnant Women," pp. 67-68, 136.
- <sup>23</sup> Kitteridge Cherry, *Womansword: What Japanese Words Say About Women*, (New York: Kodansha international, 1987), pp. 82-83.
- <sup>24</sup> Apparently Ephron was seven months pregnant with her second child when she discovered that like her heroine, Rachel, her husband was having an affair. Ephron's book was made into a movie, also called *Heartburn*, starring Meryl Streep and Jack Nicholson. See Ruthe Stein and Sylvia Rubin, "The Heartburn Syndrome," *Son Francisco Chronicle*, July 25, 1986, p. 31.
- <sup>25</sup> Maybruck, "Dreams of Pregnant Women," p. 59. The presence of the pregnant woman's husband in 24 percent of her dreams exceeds that of the appearance of her mother, with a rate of 14 percent. The pregnant woman's father appeared in only 7 percent of her dreams.
- <sup>26</sup> According to Eileen Stukane, *The Dream Worlds of Pregnancy* (New York: Quill, 1985), p. 81. Among Maybruck's pregnant subjects, mothers appeared in dreams at twice the rate (14 percent) fathers did (7 percent).
- <sup>27</sup> Maybruck, "Dreams of Pregnant Women," p. 59.
- <sup>28</sup> Described in K. B. Wood, "Weird Dreams of Mothers-to-be," p. 56. See also Stukane, *Dream Worlds of Pregnancy*, pp. 32-37, 100-102.
- <sup>29</sup> Robert D. Gillman, "The Dreams of Pregnant Women and Material Adaptation," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 36 (July 1968): 688-92.
- <sup>30</sup> Maybruck, "Dreams of Pregnant Women," p. 119.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96. Babies appeared in 15.5 percent of the total dreams of Maybruck's subjects.
- <sup>32</sup> R. Gillman, "The Dreams of Pregnant Women."
- <sup>33</sup> Maybruck, "Dreams of Pregnant Women," p. 113.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 96-98.
- <sup>35</sup> Arthur Colman and Libby Colman, *Earth Father/Sky Father: The Changing Concept of Fathering* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ.: Prentice-Hall, 1981), p. 5.
- <sup>36</sup> Monaghan, *Book of Goddesses*, p. 95. The festival of rebirth, Easter, and the word *estrus*, meaning to be in sexual heat, both reflect the same origin. Eostre's associated symbols were the hare and the egg. According to Brewer, the Teutonic goddess of dawn, called Eostre (or Eastre) had a festival held at the vernal equinox. From ancient times the egg has been a symbol of fertility and renewal of life, See Ivor H. Evans, *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), pp. 375-76.
- <sup>37</sup> The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, Inc., *Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Book by and for Women* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976), p. 265.
- <sup>38</sup> Karacan et al., "Uterine Activity During Sleep," *Sleep*, 9, no. 3 (1986): 393-97. The ten subjects, aged twenty-two to thirty-one, had continuous all-night measurements (polysomnograms),

including EEG, eye movements, muscle tension, heart rate, breathing, bulbocavernosus muscle activity, clitoral and vaginal photoplethysmograph and uterine activity. The latter was measured using a Micro Tip pressure transducer; each uterine contraction was counted. Measurements were all taken on two nights within the first four nights following cessation of menstrual bleeding (start of follicular phase).

The uterus exhibited periodic and rhythmic contractions occurring one to three times each minute. Number of contractions an hour were greater during REM (average 136.75) than during any other sleep stage and greater than in the waking state (average 127.36). There were fewest contractions per hour during slow-wave sleep (average 117.97).

There is a clear relationship between sleep stages and uterine contractility. Previous studies have shown a biological rhythm of uterine resting pressures and contractions over a twenty-four-hour period. These are generally least frequent during dark. However, this study shows that the uterus is active during sleep, especially during REM. Number of contractions change throughout the menstrual cycle.

<sup>39</sup> Maybruck, personal communication. See also note 18 above.

<sup>40</sup> Maybruck, "Dreams of Pregnant Women," p. 113. The effect of self-assertiveness is discussed on pp. 106-115.

<sup>41</sup> Carolyn Winget and Frederic T. Kapp, "The Relationship of the Manifest Content of Dreams to Duration of Childbirth in Primiparae," *Psychosomatic Medicine* 34 (1972): 313-20.

<sup>42</sup> Pierre Etevenon, personal communication. Paul Tholey's work suggests that the preferred mode of interaction with threatening dream figures may be dialogue. He urges the dreamer to ask, "Who am I?" to hostile characters. Quoted by Jayne Gackenbach Snyder in a talk at Dreamhouse in San Francisco, on December 8, 1987.

<sup>43</sup> Described in Thomas Verny, with John Kelly, *The Secret Life of the Unborn Child*, (New York: Delta, 1981), pp. 41-42.

<sup>44</sup> Described in Mary Jane Moffat & Charlotte Painter, editors, *Revelations: Diaries of Women*, (New York: Vintage, 1974), p. 239. Kollwitz recorded this dream in April, 1910.

<sup>45</sup> C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 166.

<sup>46</sup> M. Esther Harding, *Psychic Energy* (New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1963), p. 448.