

False Jasmine

False jasmine
Gelsemium nitidum

False jasmine is a deceptive plant. Though it smells as nice as true jasmine (*Jasmine officinalis*), it is not related to the jasmine family. The plant is poisonous for human consumption, whereas with true jasmine a tea can be made and the flowers are edible. The latter is also used for medical treatments.

False Jasmine
A youth ripped apart

ROOS BOUM

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For the lost child within me,
for those who weren't allowed to be a child,
and for my soul mate.

Snowflake,
wither away
can't keep you,
but memory will stay.

In loving memory of my granny.

The only thing you have to decide,
is what to do,
with the time given to you.
J.R.R. Tolkien

Preface

Self-heal plant

Prunella vulgaris

“When you are hurt, you may heal yourself,” said Nicholas Culpeper (1616-1654), English herbalist, about this plant. It is a special herb for inner or surface wounds.

‘The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Every similarity with certain existing individuals and the truth is purely coincidence.’

If only the above was true. Then I wouldn’t have to write this book about what a mother can do to her child. All people in the book exist or have existed. For privacy considerations and because the book is not meant as a revenge, I don’t use proper names. The characters are fictitious characters. Their qualities are exaggerated. In this way, I try to sketch a complete image of a mother who perpetrates the Munchausen by proxy syndrome. I cannot look into the head of another person, so their thoughts and feelings have originated from my own brain.

Unfortunately, all events truly happened. However, how I experienced something, could be totally different in the perception of someone else. And in spite of this being a novel with strong autobiographical characteristics, not all events happened to me. In the past few years, I met a lot of partners in misfortune. I have interwoven their experiences with those of mine. For that matter it is striking how much our mothers have in common and many things my companions have experienced are exactly the same.

When you think of the Munchausen by proxy syndrome (Mbps), you might possibly think about mothers who wound their children so that they can attract attention from medical staff. Although sadly this certainly happens too often, in my book you will hardly find such excesses. According to my mother, I would ‘only’ die very young. I place more emphasize on the less visible sides of Mbps. How it is to have to live with a mother who always humiliates, manipulates and

lives your life for you. The information in this book may nevertheless be shocking for a number of readers. Notwithstanding the fact that I think that I have lived only through a fraction of what some of my fellow-sufferers had to bear.

For the chapter titles, I chose plants because the names and qualities of plants fit so beautifully with the characters of people. The titles are puns or metaphors for the figures. The details and trivia in the description of the plants are references to the character traits of the people or events in the chapters concerned. Each section of the book owes its name to a part of the rose, to start with the roots, via the stem, thorns, leaves and bud, we end at the flower.

In the first place, I wrote this book to find answers to the many questions I had over what has happened to me in my childhood. Especially I looked for the 'why'. Secondly, with this book I want to hearten my partners in misfortune. With my experiences I hope to help them to cope with their past. Thirdly, I want to make Mbps more public, so that in future times it can be recognised earlier. By doing so, I want to ensure that others are spared what my companions and I had to go through.

Let nobody who recognizes himself in my story, blame and ask himself: "Why haven't I seen it?" Or: "Why haven't I interfered?"

Like me, all of you were deceived...

Recollection

1968

Snowdrop

Galanthus nivalis

The snowdrop is a little strong plant that threads its way through the snow.

It's the symbol of hope and of anew awakening after a long sad winter.

I'm standing on the back of the sofa. Outside it's snowing. I push my face against the cold glass of the window. My nose flattens so that it looks silly. When I breathe out, two little clouds appear on the windowpane. When I hold my breath, they disappear.

I'm not allowed to touch the windows. Mommy always says to me, "Don't do that Rosalind, you'll dirty my window panes.". I'm not allowed to climb on the sofa either, but by doing this, I can just look over the edge of the balcony into the nursery. I has cheerful colours on the windows. Yesterday the children were making Christmas Bells. I wasn't. Last week I missed all the fun too. I wasn't at school then. Here in our living room we already have a Christmas tree with pretty decorations. Daddy said this morning: "Ten more sleeps, and then it's Christmas!"

Children are running in the classroom, waving their arms and there... the teacher! She waves. I raise my arm, but I don't wave. I put my hand against the glass. Lifting my arm hurts. Climbing on the back of the sofa hurts as well. It makes the bandage around my tummy pull. My leg is throbbing.

Tears are coming again. Not only from the pain. I cry quietly. Mommy mustn't hear me crying. She'll get angry. I feel so lonely; I want to go back to school. The teacher is much kinder than my mommy. I don't want to be at home with her.

It's all her fault. I didn't fall. She pushed me! It was awful. I don't know why she did it. She was telling me I had done something wrong when the doctor examined me. Other children behave well at the doctor's mommy said. I don't know what I had done wrong. She said I should have shown the doctor where it hurts. But daddy always

says I mustn't tell lies. I didn't know what to do. Mommy sounded more and more angry.

I'm lying sopping wet in mommy's and daddy's bed. It hurts a lot. I can hear screaming. The woman next door whom I always call "aunty" is quarrelling with my mother. I can hear their voices: "... hospital... doctor..." again and again my mom says: "No, not on purpose.". I've got so much pain. Mommy is crying. Suddenly my uncle appears. What is he doing here? Then the doctor. He gives me an injection. That hurts as well. I hear him say something about an "ambulance". More quarrelling and angry voices, but they are getting softer...

When I wake up again my father is home. My beloved daddy. Everything will be alright now. He's afraid, like me. I can see it in his eyes.

"Hello, little one, are you awake?" Daddy sits on the bed with Puddycat.

Oh? I'm in *their* bed. I can see a very big bump. I look under the blankets. That's strange; the neighbour's footstool covers my tummy. The blankets and the bedspread are over the top of the stool. Mommy's and daddy's beautiful white bedspread has little ridges, like tiny streets. You can follow them with your finger to the big, red flower in the middle. I'm not allowed to do that in case I make it dirty. And now I'm under that same bedcover. My tummy and leg are bandaged.

Daddy sees me looking and says: "Mommy has carefully put you into our bed. You fell against the stove, remember?"

"I didn't fall."

"Yes, you did. You fell against the stove and you burnt yourself very badly," says daddy again.

"I didn't fall! Mommy pushed me against it!"

Daddy looks at me in a funny way. Then he starts to laugh aloud and says: "My little Rosy, what on earth are you thinking of? Do you think mommy would do that on purpose? It was an accident, silly girl. The towel slipped out of mommy's hand when she was drying you."

“That’s not true. She pushed me against it. I know I’m not allowed to go near the stove, because it’s hot.”

“Go back to sleep now. Puddycat can stay with you on the bed for a little while. Just this once! It was an accident silly, as if mommy would push you against a stove!”

“She did.”

Daddy’s face isn’t smiling anymore. Curtly he says: “Why on earth would your mother do that? Daddy doesn’t want to be angry with you, while you are very ill, but you must never say things like that again. Mommy loves you very much, and mommies don’t do things like that.”

The roots

1962

Devil's guts

Cuscuta epithymom

Devil's guts or hell weed is a parasite with very small leaves. It winds around other plants with a great tangle of stems and saps them to death with its penetrating roots.

"My god, Jasmine what's wrong with you?" Arthur moved quickly towards me. He took me in his arms.

I must have been white as a sheet. I saw the horror on his face. Suddenly I started to cry. Tears of relief because he was there, tears because I had succeeded, tears of pain and tears of guilt because I secretly hoped, something had been damaged inside me. I had wanted to say that I had just fallen. But before I knew I spilled out the truth: "I... I've... had a miscarriage," I cried.

My husband was completely stupefied and didn't know what to say. What came out was muddled and incoherent: "But Jas... Were you... were you pregnant? How... how wonderful. I mean how terrible, but you didn't tell me! A miscarriage? Oh, love how could that be possible? How... how many months...?"

"Two."

"And... and how, er... where..."

"In the toilet. It was so awful."

"Have you called the doctor?"

"No, no I don't want to, it'll be alright. I'm much better now."

He was very worried and wanted to call the doctor anyway. I insisted that I didn't want him to. What if he discovered the truth?

"Shall I ring mom, or er... or your sister?"

"No rest is the best thing for me at the moment. Perhaps I could have some aspirin."

It was alright now he was home. It had been terrifying in the toilet. I had terrible cramps in my belly. My back and thighs hurt horribly and my abdomen was red from the blows. There would certainly be an enormous bruise. It felt like I had been completely emptied. There was so much blood, it was horrifying. I would never know now whether the miscarriage was caused by the draught or by the blows

to my belly. It didn't matter. I had succeeded. All the same, I was less relieved than I had expected...

I must have dozed off, when I was roused by a noise. Voices? Scared stiff I recognised the voice of that woman next door. I cursed. Had he called the neighbour? What a prick! What if she found out what I had done! They talked in low voices. The neighbour came in. She was a proper mom and proud grandmother of four, always kind and caring.

"Dear, dear, what have you done?" she asked.

She knew. She knew! She didn't ask what had happened, but what I had done. I didn't like the way she looked at me. It was as though she could look right through me, into the depths of my soul.

"Are you sure you don't want us to call the doctor?" she asked.

I shook my head. The knowing glances which passed between us said enough.

Art didn't notice. He asked her what to do.

She put his mind at rest: "Put her to bed and report her ill in the morning. If you need me, I'll be at home, laddie."

The compassion in her eyes when she looked at my worried young husband irritated me. Shaking her head, she crossed the landing to her own front door.

When she was gone, Art helped me to bed. "Wouldn't you like to go to the doctor tomorrow and have him check that everything is alright? For the future, I mean."

"I would like to wait a bit, darling," I said.

He comforted me: "I know what happened was terrible, but I'm glad you were pregnant. It was sweet of you to want to keep it as a surprise for me. We can try again, can't we?"

I nodded, but I had my own thoughts.

It had all started when we stopped babysitting. I went through everything in my head.

"I'm sick and tired of all this stupid babysitting," I had said. "All that tomfoolery with those kids. Let's give it up."

"I thought you needed the money? And we can't let our friends down, can we?" Art had asked.

“They want children. Let them look after them themselves.” I got a strong feeling that Art had hoped that babysitting would arouse my maternal instincts.

“What will I tell them? We don’t even have a good excuse, have we? Or.. Hang on a minute! No more rubbers! I’m going to put a baby up you and no more babysitting. When we have a child of our own, we won’t be able to go out anymore.”

I had never openly spoken of it, but his wish for children was definitely at odds with mine. So, I hadn’t dared suggest the pill. I was afraid that my husband would conclude with good reason, that I didn’t want children. I was ashamed of these wicked thoughts, so despite his plans for a child, I had planned our love-making to avoid any risk. I was certain that I’d been very careful, but had missed another period.

Pregnant? No, impossible. I couldn’t be. I was only twenty-three. My lovely figure ruined by a hideous pregnant belly? Most certainly not! Besides, I had an excellent career ahead of me. Instead of this awful flat, I wanted to have a house somewhere in the country in a good neighbourhood. “My palace with a garden” was somewhere waiting for me. A child would spoil it all.

A few days later, I had known for certain I was expecting and that I needed to get rid of it. Now what? Go to the GP, to my sister or to mother? No. No, I couldn’t. The disgrace, the shame of it!

Where was I to go, who could help me? My brains worked overtime. The Sow! That woman from the red-light district, who had lived in the flat below me. She would know. She owed her name to the fact that she produced one baby after another. In spite of that, she had helped dozens of other women to avoid or to abort pregnancies. Would she still live there? For once, I would have to go back to that horrible, seedy, district where I had spent my miserable childhood.

1963

Baby-blue-eyes

Nemophila menziesii var. *integrifolia*

Delicate wild blue flower with black dots at the centre of the petals. The seed pod is a rounded capsule, opening like a mouth.

"Maybe you've got flu, Jasmine," suggested my husband when he brought me a cup of tea.

I gave a shrug. For the last two days I had felt as sick as a dog.

Overjoyed he asked: "Could you be pregnant again?"

My worst fear! Once more, I shrugged my shoulders.

"That would be marvellous, wouldn't it, Jas? A little baby of our own." Art became more and more enthusiastic.

But indeed I was pregnant again. It had surprised me that I was still able to get pregnant after my "miscarriage". I had hoped I had done enough damage to prevent it, but couldn't escape the truth. I wasn't at all happy, but I dared not say that. I couldn't bear the thought of this second pregnancy.

Six months later while I was looking at myself in the mirror, Art came into the bedroom.

"Look at my breasts," I said. "I look like a cow. It's awful to be a woman and have to drag yourself around with an enormous, ugly belly. My body disgusts me."

He came behind me and put his arms around me. Together we looked in the mirror. He said: "I think you're gorgeous. What could be more beautiful than your belly swollen with our baby?"

"I'm fed up with the sluggishness of my body. I can't do anything anymore. I look stupid in these horrible maternity clothes and I feel very unhappy."

"It will be alright," comforted my husband.

"Well I'm worried about the future. A child is expensive. When I have to stop work, we will never be able to save enough money to move. I want to get away from this lousy flat," I said. This flat reminded me too much of the gloomy, dreary flat in which I had

grown up. Thank goodness, there is a proper bathroom here. In my parental home in the dock area of Southampton, I had to wash myself in the kitchen. I detested that. All day, towels hung to dry above where food was prepared. It was bad enough to have to wash in the sink, but worse still was the constant stench of cabbage.

Art interrupted my reflections: "We have discussed this at length. I earn enough money to support us and we will leave Southampton and acquire that terraced house in the country when the moment is right."

"There are women, who go on working when they have a child, you know."

"No," he said a bit sharp, "a mother's job is to be with her child. And there's an end to the matter."

The future wasn't the only thing I worried about. In my heart, I was afraid that the baby would get all the attention. I was afraid that people would no longer take an interest in me and I would miss out on things like compliments on my fashionable furniture. I did not look forward to it. The baby was due at the end of November.

"I'm scared to death about the pain of childbirth. I don't like the thought of it at all," I said.

"Don't be silly, Jasmine; you aren't the first woman to give birth."

My sister Mary and my girlfriends were supportive, but even their well meant encouragement couldn't ease my mind. The only part I enjoyed about the whole process was the compliments on the baby's bedroom. Art had painted it white and a lovely butter-yellow. My parents gave us a cradle and a chest of drawers. Mary gave me secondhand baby clothes. I bought some expensive little baby grows and a magnificent pram. As I had to go through with it, I would make sure I had some beautiful things to show off. Everything looked perfect.

Winter set in early that year and would later be remembered for its heavy snowfalls. A few days before the baby was due the snow caused the busses to be out of action. When the time came, I had to walk to the hospital through a thick layer of snow. Art couldn't come with me, as it was very busy at his work.

The nurses were so friendly! They carried my case and came with me to the ward. I told them I was terrified of labour. They were very understanding and helped me into bed. There were four other women in the ward. Two appeared to have already given birth. Luckily, the babies were not on the ward. They were kept in a nursery. Thank goodness, I wouldn't have to put up with them crying.

I didn't have the energy to unpack my case so the nurses did it for me. They were full of praise for the baby's clothes. A doctor came, closed the curtains, and examined me. Like the nurses, he was very helpful and took time to answer all my detailed questions and to reassure me. I had a long conversation with him. Despite the pain, I loved hearing him talking about all the medical stuff.

At the end of the day, the contractions came quicker. They were far worse than I could ever have imagined. I had been right all along, this was really hell. Those fierce pains came again and again. Why didn't this wretched child come out, so I could get it over with? The nurses told me that this pain was to be expected but I couldn't believe it was normal. How on earth could billions of women have gone through all this?

After the waters broke late that night, I was taken to the delivery room. I thought the labour pains so far were the worst things that could happen to me, but the birth process was complete hell. It took hours; hours that seemed like years. The continuous pain and anger exhausted me. I cursed and swore like a trooper.

I yelled out: "Is this normal? It can't be right, there must be something wrong."

The nurses assured me that as soon as the baby was born, the pain would go. I had to relax. Relax? How could I relax with so much pain?

"I've been ripped open! I'm dying!" I screamed.

"You aren't dying. Pull yourself together."

It felt like it tore me in half when the baby came out and I was absolutely right, the pain didn't disappear immediately.

"You have a perfect, beautiful daughter," said the doctor. "What are you going to call her?"

I ignored him. I was tired, so tired. The nurses were very sweet. They washed me and said how well I had done. They gave me a drink. One of the nurses took my hand and looked into my eyes. I could see she understood my pain. It was good to have people around who valued me for myself.

A little later, a nurse came with the baby, bathed and dressed. While she walked, she rocked it in her arms and murmured softly sweet words to the child.

"Here's your baby girl. She's a lovely baby with the most beautiful blue eyes I've ever seen. We've called your husband and he's on his way," she said cheerfully holding the child towards me.

I turned my back on her.

"Don't you want to hold her?" the nurse asked surprised.

I shook my head. I hated that child. I hated it from the bottom of my heart, from the very depths of my soul. It would rob me of everything I so painfully had got together.

"But the little one needs you. I think she is definitely ready for a drink," she said as she walked around the bed to put the child beside me.

Breast-feeding! No way, completely out of the question. I recalled the big white udders of "the Sow", my former neighbour. I remembered her children calling out "mommy, titty" when they were hungry.

The nurse wanted to put the baby in my arms, but I couldn't bear to hold it.

"No, I don't want it," I screamed. I'LL HURT IT!" Oh my god, I was threatening! I was beside myself. I became hysterical at the thought of a child sucking my breasts.

The poor nurse stopped, startled. She was horrified. Looked at me in disgust and ran from the room with the child clasped to her breast.

I yelled after her: "I hate it! I HATE IT!"

End of 1963

Smooth sow thistle

Sonchus oleraceus

Sonchos is an old name for flaccid, prickly plants. The plant has a bitterly milky juice and is an ideal fodder for nursing sows.

“Don’t be silly. It’s about time you got out of bed and changed her nappy yourself.” My mother was impatient: “I won’t stay for ever. I’ve got better things to do you know.”

So far, I had managed to avoid doing anything for the child. As it was expected of me, I held it in my arms for a little while. The maternal love, which people said would come as a matter of course, never appeared.

A midwife had been visiting and now my mother and the neighbour came in everyday. I should have been grateful, but I felt only indifference.

Immediately after the midwife stopped coming, Art took an extra two days off work. Suddenly he became a besotted father and took over as much of her care as possible. He started bottle-feeding her, as I didn’t want to breast-feed. I had heard too many stories of cracked and painful nipples. In addition, I had a feeling that I would cause harm to it if I put it to my breast.

“Are you sure you don’t want to breast-feed?” the midwife had asked.

“You must be joking. I don’t want that baby to suck my nipples.”

“Then you will have to express your milk so she can have a bottle.”

The woman wanted to start the process immediately and started to turn down the blankets. The thought of her squeezing milk from my breasts was unbearable. Angry, I sent her away and clumsily tried to get milk to flow from my breast into a bowl. Milk from my breasts. Disgusting! So crude, I felt like a milking cow. Perhaps this was even worse than breast-feeding. I decided I couldn’t do either. The baby would have to start on artificial feeding. The midwife bound my chest tightly with a cotton bandage to stop the milk being

produced. After a while, it felt like I had two watermelons under my nightie.

All our family and friends visited. Everyone spoke in low voices. Even so, I overheard the surprised questions asked to my husband and caught the stolen glances they exchanged among themselves. I heard the cooing noises they made to the baby and saw Art act as the proud father. I thought all this attention given to the baby was unfair. Who went through hell to bring the baby into the world? Who almost died in labour? Less and less frequently, they came into my bedroom where I was resting. They avoided me, but the little attention they *did* give to me, was as if they dealt with a grieving person. If only that were true, that would mean the child had died.

By now the midwife had been gone a week and Art had returned to work. The doctor had just visited. He had been very kind, but at the same time clearly worried.

“You really must get up,” he said. “It isn’t good for you to stay in bed for so long. I will prescribe some pills for you that should help you get back on track. After that, it’s up to you. Spoil yourself a little; give yourself a few treats.”

I was glad of his attention and thought he was very competent. At last somebody who really understood me.

And now my mother nagged me, of all things, to change a nappy. Doctor’s orders first. I would spoil and pamper myself rotten. I deserved that.

“Okay mom, I’ll get up in a minute and change the nappy.”

“Good, then I’ll make you a nice cuppa.”

“You really don’t need to. I’d rather you went home and left me to get on alone.”

She looked at me surprised: “You really do have to do that nappy straight away, Jasmine. By the smell of it, it’s full.”

“I will. Go on now, I’ll be alright. Thanks for looking after me and say hello to dad for me.”

Mom, about to leave, was putting on her coat, when she froze: “You won’t do her any harm will you?” she said. “I know how careless young mothers can be.”

Did she think about something in the past? Something about herself? “Course not, mom.”

After she had pulled the door shut behind her, her words still rang in my ears. I must confess I had caught myself thinking of all sorts of scenarios in which I could get rid of the child. The easiest way would be to smother it with a pillow, so that it would look like a cot death, but I wasn’t sure that I had the courage to go through with it. I pulled up the blankets, moved Puddycat off the bed, picked up a fashion magazine, and started reading with great concentration. In the little butter-yellow room, the baby started to cry. I didn’t get up. You shouldn’t reward a child for crying, by running to it at the first sounds of a cry.

Beginning 1964

Motherwort

Leonurus artemisia

This Chinese motherwort is believed to have strengthening and stimulating effects on the uterus. In traditional Chinese medicine, women still drink syrup made from motherwort to promote the recovery of the uterus after childbirth; the herb has a strong bitter taste.

“Hey, you’re up! Feeling better?” asked Art joyfully when he came home.

“Much better.”

“Have you...” he started hesitantly.

“... changed the baby?” I completed his sentence. “Yes I’ve changed her nappy myself.” I didn’t tell him I had only just done it. After my mother had gone home, I had left the child squalling for hours with its dirty nappy. I couldn’t make myself do it. I postponed it over and over again. The stench was horrible.

“Good,” my husband said. “Splendid, I’m so pleased. Now you have taken the first step, you will find things are not so bad.” He took me in his arms. “You will enjoy our little girl. I must have known that things were better. Look what I’ve got.”

A previous surprise that had disappointed me was stamped on my memory. Then I had closed my eyes to receive his present. Art had put something into my hands; it felt warm and soft. Fur! I had so hoped it was a stole. I was about to open my eyes, when it moved. I Screamed and dropped the gift. Startled I was just in time to see a kitten run under the couch. It had been such a disappointment! This time I kept my eyes open when he handed me a parcel. Luckily, the shape of the box suggested a ring. Suddenly my fingers trembled and with some difficulty, I opened the lid. A diamond ring!

“It is... it’s brilliant,” I stammered.

“Yes, literally,” he said and we both had to laugh. My husband was over the moon. Now everything would be alright. His darling wife laughed again! He couldn’t bear to see me unhappy.

The next day I showed the ring to a friend. She held the exquisite jewel.

“It’s a diamond,” I told her. “Art bought it for me, because I had such a terribly painful labour.”

“Oh well, when you hold such a helpless little mite in your arms, you forget all about the pain, don’t you?” said my friend.

She really didn’t understand. Couldn’t she see that holding the child couldn’t in any way make up for all the distress and pain?

“My son didn’t want to come out either,” she continued. “It was too warm and cosy inside me.” She laughed, remembering. “They had to get him out with a suction pump. That was terrible. I really had a very difficult labour. You’ve had it easy and you have a beautiful baby. The pump marked my baby’s head. They said it would disappear after a while, but you can still see it, can’t you? You should be grateful that they didn’t have to do anything like that with your baby.” Distracted by her thoughts she fiddled absentmindedly with my beautiful ring.

Dutifully, I nodded. I didn’t understand how she could be so positive. Did she really think I had forgotten all the pain? How could her

labour have been worse than mine? That was quite impossible. I could hear her talk in the background about baby ointment and washing the nappies. I really didn't think I could stand it much longer.

"How did you find her name?" she asked. "Rosalind is a posh name. Isn't it Shakespearean? She's not named after your parents?"

"Oh no, I wouldn't dream of calling it after them. My parents have boring, common names. We liked this name better." I didn't tell her that I had deliberately chosen a name that would be difficult to shorten. A diminutive makes a child cute and seem special and helps it to be the centre of attention, a place reserved for me alone!

"Oh dear, I almost forgot what I brought for you," my friend called out while she gave me back my ring. She plunged her hand into her bag and produced a parcel.

I opened it. It was a beige and red photo album with two drawings of babies on the cover. I had to say something. "Er... that's very sweet of you."

"Come on open it," she insisted.

It wasn't an empty photo album as I had expected. On the first page, it had things printed like: "My name is... I was born on... I weighed... lbs."

An empty frame was labelled: "This is my birth announcement" with instructions to glue the card in. On the next pages similar things were printed. There was even a space for a lock of hair and another for the first tooth. What a load of nonsense! What on earth would I do with it? It wasn't any good to me.

"Gosh, er, yes it is nice."

"It's really fun to do you know," said my friend who picked up my hesitation. "I keep mine up to date. It's so nice to take photos; kids are grown up before you know it. Later on you will be able to look back and see what your daughter was like when she was little."

I couldn't imagine keeping a diary like that. Why other women should want to, I couldn't figure out. I didn't want to share this thought with anyone else. I was sure they wouldn't understand me.

"How kind," my husband said that evening, "I didn't know you could get things like this. What a good idea to record all the changes.

It's so easy to forget. We can stick the photos in the album as soon as they are printed." I didn't really want to be seen in photos with the child, but as Art was so enthusiastic, he could get on with it. It would save me a lot of time.

"I will draw our baby girl now. She looks so sweet when she is asleep," he said the same evening. Drawing and painting were his greatest passion. He had studied art at university and always dreamed of being an artist. But he knew, of course, that his sketching wouldn't bring in any money.

Within half an hour, he had a charcoal sketch on paper. The result was excellent I must say. The baby was lying on her back with her head turned to the right. Both little arms above her head on the pillow with her fists tightly clenched. The whole time the child slept like an angel not moving at all. It was as if she knew she had to pose for her proud father. He placed the drawing on the easel beside the cot and took a photo of the drawing and the dreaming original.

February 1964

Narcissus

Narcissus pseudonarcissus

In Greek mythology, Narcissus was an egocentric boy. As a punishment, a goddess of vengeance made him fall in love with his own reflection forever. The narcissus bulb is poisonous.

A few months went by. I felt useless without my job and it seemed that nobody valued me anymore. I struggled to accept the situation. My life took on a new rhythm. Making a virtue out of necessity, I made myself beautiful clothes in the latest fashion. My figure was back and I was slim enough to buy a pair of the new tight jeans that everyone wore. I looked ravishing again.

Art didn't want me to get up in the middle of the night, so he gave the baby its night feed. He said I did my share during the day. It hardly disturbed him. He never heard her cry, so he set an alarm to

wake himself when it was time for her bottle. He got up, fed her, and went straight back to sleep, waking in the morning as lively as a cricket. He gave her a morning bottle, changed her nappy, and took off for work.

The rest of the day, I fed it and even persuaded myself to change the nappy. In spite of all this, I couldn't stop it crying. God, that creature could scream! It drove me mad. Luckily, my neighbour Mrs Smith called in every day for a tea and loved to fuss with the child. Then the whining finally stopped and I got some peace. I seemed not cut out to be a mother.

"Shall we take the baby for a walk in the pram?" she suggested. "The sun is shining and the baby always enjoys it. You've got such a nice set of embroidered sheets with those tiny pink roses. It's as though she lies on a bed of roses. Oh, that's funny. Rose on a "bed of roses" said Mrs Smith delighted with her little word play.

"She is called Rosalind. Rose sounds like that skin disease erysipelas. I don't like her name to be shortened."

"I like Rose much better, so I'll call her Rose," she said in an irritatingly priggish way. "Shall I bath her before the walk? She always smells so lovely after a bath. She is such a sweet baby."

"Oh yes, of course, bath her again." She didn't pick up the sarcastic undertone.

My neighbour loved to dress the child in the smart baby clothes. After that, she carried it downstairs to the pram that waited in the porch.

Outside a passer-by said: "What a lovely pram you have. May I look at your baby?"

Many people we met, wanted to look under the hood to see the baby. My neighbour pulled back the covers a little. "Ah, what a beautiful baby you have brought into this world. She must be a girl. She looks so like you. I'm sure she will be just as pretty," said the woman to me.

The friendly admiration of people made me feel complimented and valued. I soon began to take her everywhere to show her off. Having a baby seemed sometimes to literally open doors.

"May I help you, young lady?" offered a man.

“Thanks,” I replied, “the step is quite high.”

The cavalier lifted the pram into the bus. When we reached our stop, there were other helping hands waiting.

Due to these experiences, I began to look forward to my visit to the doctor for the child’s first inoculations.

I dressed up in my most flattering clothes for the occasion. My new winter coat was wonderfully slimming and following the latest fashion I had put my hair up in a knot and applied red lipstick.

The admiring looks of the other patients in the waiting room spoke for themselves. Everyone looked at the beautifully dressed doll in my arms. I didn’t hold back from showing it off. I was very proud of our smart clothes and beautiful pram.

I was called in. The whole visit went as I had imagined. The doctor talked to me as an equal about the need to inoculate babies. It was fantastic... that is, until the injection. At that point, the child started to cry. It was very upset and didn’t stop screaming. The little tongue trilled in her ugly toothless mouth. Her normally, almost alabaster, white face turned bright red. I hardened. What an ugly little monster. When I did not attempt to soothe her, luckily the doctor misinterpreted my behaviour.

“Don’t be shocked, this is a very understandable reaction for a little baby. Don’t be embarrassed by other people when your baby cries. Everyone understands that babies cry from time to time.” He left it crying and comforted me in a lovely, fatherly way. Wonderful, all the attention given to me instead to the howling child.

After about five days, the baby was unusually quiet. Could she be ill? Oh well, who cares, the silence was a relief. At last, a day without her horrible whining. But if she was ill... I daydreamed about the visit to the GP. In spite of the baby howling, it had been very pleasant. I wished every day could be like that. A sudden thought struck me... I could go to the doctor again with the excuse of the child’s silence.

“No,” the doctor said, “it’s quite normal for a baby to be a little bit off colour after an injection. Don’t worry. Just tuck her up in bed

and if she doesn't want to take her feed, add a little honey to the milk. I will see you again in a month for her second injection."

With those comforting words I went back home, happy at the prospect of three more visits to the doctor to look forward to.

In March, I went back for part two and in April for part three. A few days after each injection, I went back to the doctor. Of course, I knew there was nothing wrong with the baby, but I couldn't resist the opportunity of extra visits to him.

"Come in, come in," said the doctor. He closed the door of the consulting room behind me. "Well, how are we doing?"

"Fine, thank you," I replied.

"That's good. How's your little girl?"

"Fine, but as usual she is very quiet after her injection. Normally she cries all the time. That's what I've come for. Her constant screaming drives me mad. I can't sleep."

"Are you breast or bottle feeding?"

"Bottle feeding."

"Have you enough milk to express?"

"I didn't... have enough milk," I lied.

"Oh, I thought..." he started hesitatingly.

Quickly I interrupted: "The midwife advised me to give her a substitute."

"Well, the sort of milk isn't important. With bottle feeding it's easier for air to get into the stomach and give the baby wind. This can make her feel uncomfortable and cry."

He examined it thoroughly, but didn't find anything wrong. The doctor told me that some children do cry a lot. It was often a phase that children go through. I wasn't satisfied with this answer and decided to seek out more information for myself.

The public library had a wealth of information: medical encyclopaedias, journals, and books about all kinds of childhood illnesses, genetic conditions, and disabilities. A new, fascinating world opened before me. I took the child with me and spent many hours in the library. It slept during the walk there and snoozed contentedly between the shelves of books.