

*The below originally appeared in the 2003  
New American Library edition of "Rosemary's Baby"*



## *An Afterword*

Having observed that the most suspenseful part of a horror story is before, not after, the horror appears, I was struck one day by the thought (while not listening to a lecture) that a fetus could be an effective horror if the reader knew it was growing into something malignly different from the baby expected. Nine whole months of anticipation, with the horror *inside* the heroine!

Several years later the thought came back to me when, in the wake of a Broadway flop, I was fishing for an idea for a suspense novel.

I tried to figure out exactly what that fetus was growing into. Genuine medical horrors were out; hardly the stuff of popular fiction. I could imagine only two possibilities: my unfortunate heroine had to be impregnated either by an extra-terrestrial or the Devil. E.T.s had already fathered children in *The Midwich Cuckoos*, a novel by John Wyndham, and though that book had dealt with several children growing up rather than their mothers bearing them, I nonetheless felt I was stuck with Satan.

In whom I believed not at all.

But I had no other intriguing ideas and a family to support. I read up on witchcraft, and late in 1965 set to work.

I anchored my unbelievable story in the reality of Manhattan in that season — as much to make myself believe it as to win the belief of readers. I saved the daily newspapers, checking back through them on the transit strike, the incoming shows, the mayoral election, writing always a few months ahead of Rosemary and Guy's calendar.

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I wasn't at all sure how the book would be received. I was well aware that what I was doing was standing the story of Mary and Jesus on its head, and I feared that editors and publishers might run me out of town on a rail. But I could see nowhere else to go with the idea.

When I checked back through the newspapers for the events of the optimal date for the baby's conception — so he would arrive exactly half the year 'round from Christmas — I found, on October 4, 1965, Pope Paul's visit to New York City and the Mass he celebrated at Yankee Stadium that night. I took it as a sign — though I don't, of course, believe in signs — and kept writing.

Sure enough, I wasn't run out of town on a rail. Lee Wright, the editor of my earlier novel *A Kiss Before Dying*, loved the new *Baby*, and so did Random House's genial maestro Bennett Cerf. He suggested that Rosemary might be hit by a taxi on the way to a hospital and the baby disappear somehow, but I said I didn't think that was a good idea and he didn't mention it again. (Publishers deferred to authors in those days.) The book was favorably reviewed and became a best seller, thanks in large part to a generous quote from Truman Capote which Random House cannily printed on the front of the jacket.

The movie rights had been sold before publication to William Castle, an amiable shlock producer/director best known for wiring theater seats to jolt patrons of *The Tingler*. I wasn't thrilled, but no other offers had come in. Fortunately Castle turned to Paramount for financing, whereupon Robert Evans took charge and brought in a much-talked-about young European film maker to direct and write the screenplay — Roman Polanski. The result was possibly the most faithful film adaptation ever made. It incorporates whole pages of the book's dialogue and even uses specific colors mentioned. It was not only Polanski's first Hollywood film but also the first one he made based on someone else's material; I'm not sure he realized he had the right to make changes. His understated directorial style perfectly complemented the style of the book, and the casting couldn't have been better. I'm one of several people who claim credit for first suggesting Mia Farrow for the leading role.

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The movie of *Rosemary's Baby* attracted some of the hostility I had worried about while writing the book. A woman screamed "Blasphemy!" in the lobby after the first New York preview, and I subsequently received scores of reprimanding letters from Catholic schoolgirls, all worded almost identically. The Legion of Decency condemned the film, but the film turned around and condemned the Legion; when the film became a major hit despite or because of its C rating, the Legion, already on its last legs, was disbanded.

Lately I've had a new worry. The success of *Rosemary's Baby* inspired *Exorcists* and *Omens* and lots of *et ceteras*. Two generations of youngsters have grown to adulthood watching depictions of Satan as a living reality. Here's what I worry about now: If I hadn't pursued an idea for a suspense novel almost forty years ago, would there be quite as many religious fundamentalists around today?

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