

12. ROSEMARY'S BABY (1967)

by Ira Levin

Author

Ira Levin was born in New York City in 1929 and studied at New York University. He has written many popular thrillers, including *A Kiss Before Dying* (see page 62), *The Stepford Wives* and *The Boys from Brazil*.

Genre

Rosemary's Baby is a thriller, a book that tells an exciting story. A thriller often takes the form of a crime or detective story. *Rosemary's Baby* also reminds us of the 'Gothic novel', a type of novel that first became popular in the late eighteenth century. Gothic novels are usually set in old, mysterious buildings where all kinds of horrible things happen; often there are ghosts or other supernatural forces at work.

Setting

The events in the story take place in New York City in 1966 and 1967. The main characters live in 'the Bramford', an old, dark apartment building. It is said to have a 'Victorian' atmosphere: tall rooms with old-fashioned fireplaces, a suitable setting for a thriller.

Point of View

The story is told from Rosemary's point of view; the reader knows only what she knows.

Main Characters

Guy Woodhouse, a young actor.

Rosemary, his wife.

Roman and Minnie Castevet, their neighbours.

Other Characters

Edward Hutchins (Hutch), an older friend of Rosemary's.

Terry Gionoffrio, a young woman who lives with the Castevets.

Dr Hill and Dr Abraham Sapirstein, obstetricians (doctors who specialize in childbirth).

Laura-Louise McBurney, the *Fountains*, the *Weeves*, *Dr Shand*, friends of the Castevets.

Elise, Joan, Tiger, Claudia, Rosemary's girl friends.

Grace Cardiff, a friend of Hutch's.

Donald Baumgart, an actor, Guy's rival.

Dominick, Guy's vocal coach (*spraakleraar*).

The Story

Part 1

1. Guy Woodhouse, an actor, and his wife Rosemary have just signed a lease on a modern five-room apartment. Then they hear that a four-room apartment has become available in the Bramford, an old, black building. They prefer this apartment because of its romantic, old-fashioned atmosphere. They have a look at the apartment and hear that the previous tenant, Mrs Gardenia, has died in hospital. Rosemary is very enthusiastic and persuades Guy to get out of the other lease contract.
2. Edward Hutchins, an older friend, advises them not to rent the Bramford apartment. He says it is a building where bad things happen. Many years ago the Trench sisters, who ate children, lived there, and Adrian Marcato, who practised witchcraft. More recently a dead baby has been found in the basement. But Guy and Rosemary do not change their mind, and start decorating their apartment.
3. After moving into the apartment, Guy and Rosemary discover that the wall between their bedroom and the neighbours' is rather thin. Now and then they hear the neighbours, the Castevets, talking. They meet various neighbours, including Terry Gionoffrio. She lives with the Castevets, who have been very kind to her. She wears a good-luck charm they have given her, an open-worked silver ball filled with something that has a strong, unpleasant smell. Terry tells Rosemary and Guy that Mrs Gardenia and the Castevets quarrelled just before Mrs Gardenia fell into a coma and died.
4. One evening Rosemary and Guy return from a party to find Terry lying dead in front of the Bramford. She has committed suicide by jumping out of a window. The Castevets, who arrive at that moment, do not believe that she killed herself on purpose until the police show them a note left by Terry. That night Rosemary has a confused dream about the school she went to as a child.
5. Rosemary meets Minnie Castevet and shows her round the apartment. Minnie asks all kinds of questions, and invites Rosemary and Guy to dinner. Guy receives the news that Donald Baumgart will get a part in a new play instead of himself.
6. Guy and Rosemary have a poor dinner but a fairly pleasant evening with the Castevets. Minnie asks a lot of questions about Rosemary's relatives. Back in their own apartment Rosemary and Guy make fun of the Castevets. Rosemary is surprised when Guy says he is going back the next night to hear more of Roman Castevet's stories about the theatre world.
7. While Guy is talking to Roman the next evening, Minnie and her friend Laura-Louise come to keep Rosemary company. Minnie gives Rosemary Terry's good-luck charm, the ball filled with tannis root. That evening and for some time afterwards Guy seems worried and depressed. But one

Saturday night, when Rosemary returns from an evening at the theatre (Guy gave her the tickets, which he says he got from his vocal coach) he is in much better spirits. On Monday Guy hears that Donald Baumgart has suddenly gone blind, and Guy can have his part in the play. Rosemary is happy when Guy tells her that he wants a baby now.

8. On 4 October, the day of the Pope's visit to New York, Rosemary gets a telephone call from her sister, who has a feeling that something will happen to Rosemary.

Rosemary cooks a special dinner to celebrate the fact that they plan to 'make a baby' that night. Minnie contributes the dessert, a chocolate mousse. Rosemary thinks it tastes funny, but eats most of it. When she feels dizzy she blames it on all the drinks she has had. She goes to bed and has a strange dream in which many things happen to her. She dreams that Guy, dressed in a leather costume, makes love to her violently while she is tied to a bed, with naked people watching.

9. In the morning Rosemary finds scratches on her body, and Guy confesses that he made love to her while she was sleeping, hoping to 'make a baby'. Rosemary cannot decide what to think of this and the strange dream she had. In the weeks that follow, there is a distance between Rosemary and Guy. She spends a few days alone in a cabin belonging to Hutch, and feels much better when she returns.

10. Rosemary goes to see Dr Hill, who confirms that she is pregnant, but asks her to come back for another blood sample. The Castevelts are delighted to hear that Rosemary is pregnant. They advise her to go to their friend Dr Sapirstein instead of Dr Hill, and they make an appointment for her.

Part 2

1. Dr Sapirstein tells Rosemary to take a daily herb drink that Minnie will prepare for her. He advises her to eat and drink whatever she wants. In November Rosemary feels a sharp pain in her belly, but Sapirstein assures her that it is common and that everything is fine.

2. Hutch comes to see Rosemary, and she tells him she is pregnant. He is surprised that she looks so thin and unhealthy. Roman Castevel rings the doorbell and Rosemary introduces him to Hutch. A bit later Guy unexpectedly comes home, his make-up still on. When Hutch is leaving he can find only one of his gloves. Late that evening he telephones Rosemary and asks her to meet him the next morning at eleven.

3. Hutch does not show up for their appointment the next morning. When Rosemary calls his apartment, she hears from Grace Cardiff, a friend of Hutch's, that he is in hospital, in a deep coma.

4. Rosemary's pain grows worse. She eats her meat almost raw. Apart from the Castevelts she sees hardly anyone and she suddenly decides to plan a

party for all their younger friends, and not invite the Castevelts. Guy does not like the idea, but Rosemary goes through with it energetically.

5. Rosemary's party is a great success. But some of her friends are worried because she looks so ill and has been in pain for three months now. She promises she will see another doctor. After the party Guy is angry at Rosemary for listening to them, but as they are quarrelling about it the pain suddenly stops. A moment later Rosemary feels the baby moving for the first time.

6. Now that the pain has stopped, Rosemary sleeps well and eats better food. Guy's new play is not a success, but his own role is highly praised by the critics, and he is offered all kinds of good acting jobs.

When Rosemary is in her ninth month, Hutch dies in hospital. At the funeral Hutch's friend Grace Cardiff gives Rosemary a book Hutch had intended to give her earlier. It is a book about witchcraft.

7. The book is called *All of Them Witches*. One whole chapter is about Adrian Marcato, who used to live in the Bramford, and has a son named Steven. Using her Scrabble letters, Rosemary discovers that Stephen Marcato is an anagram for Roman Castevel. She now understands that the music and singing she has sometimes heard were part of witch sabbaths in the Castevelts' apartment. When she tells Guy all this, he refuses to believe that the Castevelts are witches, although he admits that Roman must be Steven Marcato.

8. Rosemary tells Dr Sapirstein about her discovery. He is sympathetic and gives her pills so that she need not drink Minnie's mixtures any longer. He tells her that the Castevelts are going on a journey because Roman has an illness that leaves him only a few months to live.

9. Rosemary meets Guy's vocal coach Dominick, who says that he never gave Guy any theatre tickets. She becomes suspicious and wonders if Guy wanted to have her out of the way that evening. Remembering incidents like Donald Baumgart's blindness and Hutch's visit and sudden illness the next day, Rosemary begins to suspect that Guy must have become a witch himself. He must have promised the witches the baby in return for his success as an actor.

Rosemary decides to go to Dr Sapirstein for help. But when his assistant happens to mention that Sapirstein uses tennis root, too, she runs out of his office.

10. Terribly frightened, Rosemary goes to see Dr Hill, who promises to help her. But while she is resting he phones Guy, who arrives with Sapirstein to take her home. Inside the Bramford she escapes from them and locks herself in the apartment. She tries to telephone her friends but no one is at home. Then Guy and all the Castevelts' friends come in. Rosemary knows she is lost. At that moment the birth pains begin.

Part 3

1. When Rosemary comes round she is told the baby is dead. Guy answers all her questions about the events of the last few months. Her milk is taken from her by means of a pump and the women of the Castevet clan sit by her bed in turn. When Rosemary hears a baby crying somewhere in the building, she becomes suspicious, especially because her milk is never thrown away in her presence.
2. Rosemary is convinced that her baby is in the hands of the witches, waiting to be sacrificed during a ritual. She finds a secret door leading to the Castevets' apartment. There she finds a group of people, including Guy, standing and sitting round a black cradle. The Castevets, who are supposed to be still in Europe, are there too. In the cradle she finds her baby, but he has yellow cat-eyes with black slits instead of pupils. Roman tells her that the baby is Satan's son and is called Adrian. He has a tail, tiny horns and claws. Rosemary's first impulse is to kill the baby, but her mother instinct is stronger. She decides to take care of her son, hoping to rid him of his evil nature. She insists that his name is Andrew and the others finally agree. They worship Rosemary, saying 'Hail Rosemary, Mother of Andrew'.

Questions (The numbers refer to the chapters.)

Part 1

2. Why has Rosemary so little contact with her family?
3. Why does Rosemary hate to do laundry at the Bramford?
4. The words of Sister Agnes in Rosemary's dream do not make sense. Where may they be coming from?
6. Why does Rosemary feel depressed at bedtime?
7. What strikes Rosemary when she goes into the bedroom after coming home from the theatre?
8. How does Guy react when Rosemary does not want to finish her desert?
9. What bet do Guy and Rosemary make when Rosemary comes home from the cabin?
10. Why does Rosemary hang the good-luck charm around her neck again?

Part 2

2. What is unusual about the candles Minnie gave Rosemary when the electricity was out?
3. Whom does Hutch's situation remind you of?
4. What is so strange about the toast proposed by Roman on New Year's Eve?
5. What does Rosemary fear when she does not feel the pain anymore? Why?
6. How does Guy react to Hutch's death?
7. Why does Rosemary fear for the safety of her baby?
8. What happens to the book *All of Them Witches*?

9. What does Rosemary find out when she telephones Donald Baumgart?
10. How does Rosemary manage to get away from Guy and Sapirstein?

Part 3

1. How does Rosemary find out that her milk is not thrown away?
2. How does she escape the woman set to guard her?

To Think About

After finishing the book, see if you can explain:

1. Why Terry committed suicide.
2. Why Roman has been all around the world and receives so much foreign mail.
3. What Rosemary's 'dream' (Part 1, Chapter 8) really was.
4. What happened to Mrs Gardenia and to Hutch.
5. Why the Castevets pretended to go on a journey.

