



A World without Martha

*A Memoir of Sisters,
Disability, and Difference*

Victoria Freeman



Contents

<i>Author's Note</i>	ix
1 Baby	3
2 Conceptions	6
3 One on Every Street	20
4 Substitutions	33
5 The Fairy Hill	50
6 Jesus Loves Me	62
7 Fair Exchange	84
8 "Progress and Happiness"	94
9 Revolutions	113
10 Normalization	128
11 Becoming Human	147
12 Into the Fire	163
13 Breakthroughs	177
14 Echoes	190
15 Crossing Over	202
16 Ashes	217
17 Remembering	235
18 Not Ending	247
19 Second Chances	260
20 How Far You've Come	275
21 Remember Every Name	291
<i>Postscript</i>	307
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	309
<i>A Note on Sources</i>	311

Author's Note

A memoir is always a work of reconstruction and, inevitably, fiction's cousin.

The people who inhabit these pages reflect only certain dimensions of the real people who shaped my life; they would likely represent themselves quite differently, and others have experienced them differently. But this is who they were to me, in terms of the particular story I am telling. They – and others not mentioned here – have also been many other things to me.

The family dynamics that arose after my sister Martha's birth had a profound impact on my other siblings as well. Though this is my story, many aspects of it were shared by my sister Kate and brother, Eric, though some of their experiences were markedly different, and they have gone through their own struggles and learning.

In some cases, I have changed identifying details to protect people's privacy, particularly the staff associated with the Rideau Regional Centre, other than senior administrators, whose identities are well known. I have changed the names of many people who are not members of my immediate family, particularly those with whom I am no longer in contact.

Very rarely, I've combined or compressed incidents for clarity and a more streamlined narrative, but the essence of my experience was as it is described.

A word of caution about the language used in this memoir: the early chapters reflect the language used during my childhood, including the "r" word, which is the only way I can truly convey the power of those words to shape the social reality that my sister and I struggled within. For most readers – and especially people

with intellectual disabilities – these words are profoundly hurtful. I hope the rest of the book marks a journey away from those words and that, in the end, I am able to make vivid the experience of oppression without reinscribing it. This is an ongoing challenge as I unlearn the ablist attitudes that so profoundly shaped me as a child.

There is no way to tell my own story without revealing personal details about my parents and siblings. I have thought long and hard about the risks of doing this. All I can say is that I love them dearly to this day, but I also believe that loyalty and honesty are not antithetical. I have had to balance the need to honour my sister's memory and speak of events in my own life on the one hand with shielding my family from hurtful scrutiny on the other. My siblings have had the opportunity to read and comment on this work; my parents, who were both afflicted with dementia for many years before they died, did not. I have tried to contextualize their actions and attitudes to the best of my ability.

I also want to acknowledge the ethical challenges in writing about my sister, who during her life had a limited ability to speak for herself and be heard by others, including me. I cannot represent her inner life except by asking a series of questions and drawing on the accounts of others who may have had similar experiences or at least lived in similar contexts, but how one interprets one's own experience is always unique.

I share my story not only to illuminate a difficult aspect of my own experience but also to encourage other siblings of people institutionalized for intellectual disability to break their often decades-long silence and share their own stories. We have been isolated and unknown to one another for far too long, our pain and loss often unrecognized in our families and in society at large. Our siblings endured more profound injustices, but we also have stories to tell ... and telling them is healing.

Ultimately, a memoir is not just a telling for others; it is also an accounting to and for oneself. We live by the stories we are told ... and by the stories we tell ourselves. I have had to dive deeply into this story – my past – and be open and accepting of the person who emerges on the other side.



“We have hung a little chickadee like this in a window ... as an everyday memento of Martha.”

1

Baby

Martha was my baby sister, and I had never known any other.

She couldn't talk, and I didn't expect her to. She did not sit up unassisted when other babies did, but I had no benchmarks to measure her by. She was simply a big, floppy baby, and I had come to love her with the proprietary love of the eldest child for a younger sibling who is no threat to her. She rarely cried. She didn't fuss. And she certainly was no threat since it was clear my mother loved me more. Indeed, my mother delighted in everything I did, lavishly praising each new accomplishment. I was smart enough for two, it seemed.

I enjoyed my sister even if she couldn't do much. I patiently played with her, dangled toys above her face, talked baby talk to her; I tickled her as my parents tickled me. She fascinated me, though she often also bored me. Like any baby, she slept a lot.

Luckily, Martha was a calm and happy baby – the easiest to care for, by my mother's own account. And Martha loved to watch me; from her, I learned that I was endlessly fascinating. I performed for her, making faces, jumping up and down on one foot, spinning around in circles, sticking out my tongue, goading her to react. It was easy enough to frighten her, but it took a long, long time before she learned to smile. I think, because it took so very long, her smile was all the more precious to me. I could see it in her eyes first, and then very slowly the corners

of her mouth would lift. I played with her for hours, just trying to earn that smile. She would smile, and I would smile back; I smiled again, and she smiled some more. After a while I would make faces and play peekaboo, and I would be rewarded with her laughter. I remember a huge stuffed dog with yellow fur that was parked on the floor of her room. I would sit on it and boisterously sing snatches of imitation baby talk to try to make her laugh.

I'm not sure when Martha finally rolled over or sat up. My mother had kept a little diary in which she noted the date when I reached every one of these milestones, but she did not do the same for Martha. I was considered precocious: as I approached my fourth birthday, I was already sounding out words on the page and half-reading, half-memorizing the simplest children's books. I would show Martha the books my father read to me at night, *Tim and Charlotte Lost at Sea* or *The Cat in the Hat*, and pretend to read to her, pointing to all the pictures and saying the names of things, as my parents had done for me. Her eyes would move from the book to me, and back to the book, to my hand, and to me. Always to me. Her eyes followed me everywhere with a look of perpetual wonder.

My clearest early memories are of dancing. I was not yet four when I first started dancing to my parents' recording of Chopin's music for the ballet *La Source*. The story that I enacted through my dance was always the same, and it still comes back to me when I hear the music. I was a little seed that grew into something bigger and more beautiful, a plant or an animal or a baby human. I was the kernel of the thing itself. I grew towards the sun. I danced for joy. Like my baby sister, I had started from a seed, an egg, a small, inconsequential thing; the dance was always about growing, about being alive. I can still remember those wonderful dances, in the living room in the old house on Glengarry Road, my father setting up the record for me on the clunky old record player that also played 78s. I was inspired by the beautiful ballerina on the album cover, dressed all in diaphanous white except for the fleshy pink of ballet tights and ballet

slippers. I'm sure Martha watched me from her baby seat or a blanket on the floor as I became that ballerina – or a princess.

A year later, I learned to dance the twist and loved to sing along to Chubby Checker's lyrics about a little "sis" who really danced up a storm.

Yeah you should see my little Sis
You should see my little Sis
She really knows how to rock
She knows how to twist
Come on and twist yeah baby twist

But Martha was gone by then.

2

Conceptions

I was two years old when my sister was conceived and then imagined into being. She was never just herself; she was always also who my parents thought she would become.

As the tiny embryo became a fetus and made its presence known, my mother formed a relationship with it; she came to know it, though it was a felt knowledge rather than a knowledge based on sight. How strange that over nine long months a mother never lays eyes on the new being taking shape inside her, except through the thick and opaque skin of her abdomen, where an elbow or foot occasionally pushes outwards like a hidden actor disturbing the closed curtain on a stage. How easy it was for my mother to imagine that she and this new child would be united in a blissful, perfect love – as had been the case with me.

The Buddhists say we choose our parents before birth, when our souls have not yet entered a new reincarnation. I saw an image in a children's book once of a multitude of prospective parents calling out to the unembodied soul, "Choose me! Choose me!" and the unborn child selecting the mother and father who appeared most loving.

But I know now that every birth is a revelation and an extraordinary meeting, rather like the moment in some arranged marriages when the groom lifts the veil and husband and wife

see each other for the first time and meet their future. I have also come to understand that birth is a separation. Each newborn sees the blurry outside of the world it has been inside. Its mother is no longer a rich, red glow of blood and tissue, a warm cushion of amniotic fluid, an ever-present heartbeat but a presence with skin and moving arms and legs, an expressive face, and milk-gushing breasts who holds her infant close but also inexplicably moves away from it. The whole world the infant has known is now only one element of a much larger universe, not the totality the child assumed its mother to be.

Now mother and child must navigate an imperfect and finite relationship, with all its stresses, strains, and strange twists of fate. It is a vulnerable time, for an infant is helpless and totally dependent, and in this new world it may or may not be loved, or even welcomed. Yet to be welcome on this earth is a profound human need.



My younger sister emerged into the light of a September day in 1958, in a delivery room in sleepy Ottawa, Canada. From the moment of her arrival it was evident that she had the telltale flat face, almond-shaped eyes, and other distinctive physical features then described as “mongoloid,” a term not yet outlawed by the World Health Organization as an insult to the Mongolian People’s Republic. Doctors would later classify my sister as an “imbecile,” a being – she was hardly considered a person – who suffered moderate to severe mental retardation and who had an expected IQ of between 26 and 50, which ranked her between “moron” (IQ of 51 to 70) and “idiot” (IQ of 0 to 25). Others would simply call her a retard. Her birth was considered a calamity by all of those attending and all of those who might have loved her.

All my life I have had to contend with these words and their effect on my sister and on me, words that are now the shameful detritus of a less enlightened age but that still live on in various subterranean nooks and crannies, for all our belief in progress. Almost sixty years later, they still live on in me.

This is the story of how my sister and I were separated and what we each lost because of those words. It is also the story of how that was not the whole story between us.



I hold a photograph of my mother, pregnant and wearing a striped and polka-dotted blouse, sitting in a wooden Muskoka chair in our backyard on Glengarry Road, reading a book. It is date-stamped August 1958, a month before my mother went into labour and gave birth to the child who would become my sister.

That summer before my sister was born, I was a toddler with a toddler's volcanic passions but very limited understanding. How strange that I have no memory of my mother's swelling belly or of what I was told about it, that all of these absolutely foundational experiences are without conscious trace. I try to will myself back into that well of memory but only swim endlessly through clouds of grey mist, back, back, back ... to nothing.



My mother, pregnant with Martha, August 1958.

I believe, however, that my mother conveyed to me her sense of excitement. I believe she conjured in me a vision of this sister- or brother-to-be who would magically escape from the confines of my mother's body.

I believe I was there in the garden when this photograph was taken, just outside the frame, but perhaps it is only seeing the photograph that creates the illusion of remembering. Perhaps I have only imagined playing contentedly a few yards from her outstretched legs, picking dandelions and bringing them to her to make a flowery necklace.

My mother was twenty-seven, relaxed, expectant. She had married my father three years previously and had one healthy and much-loved child (me), and she believed she was gestating another. All seemed to be progressing as it should. She had a university degree, and her husband, although then making only ten thousand dollars a year, had prospects. In marrying a man with a master's degree, an economist employed at the Bank of Canada, she had successfully transcended her parents' social



My jubilant parents holding me, 1956.

class of small shopkeepers and hairdressers. She and my father socialized with other up-and-coming couples; the men were civil servants, the women educated and ambitious. They would have three or four children each, spaced rationally, not a herd of children all higgledy-piggledy.

The person I am now cannot remember the person I was then, before my sister was born. I am told I was a pink and golden baby, the apple of my mother's eye, and my father's too. I was definitely welcomed: I lived in a swirl of bliss. I was treasured, humoured, played with, cuddled. My mother was instructed to feed me every four hours, but I don't think she stuck to this schedule. She read Dr. Spock and joined the Mothercraft Society, as modern, conscientious mothers did in the mid-1950s. But to her, motherhood was much more than a responsibility or social role; it was also, at least in its best moments, her glory. She would never do to me what her own mother had done to her, which was abandon her.



My father drove my mother to the Grace Hospital after her waters broke. I have imagined what came next many times, for I could not possibly have witnessed it, left as I was in the care of my grandmother.

It was a warm, beautiful, early autumn day. My mother and father passed through the city in the grey Studebaker, a large family car that had recently replaced the red MG convertible that my father had driven to the hospital with the top down when my mother was about to give birth to me. My mother was anxious but excited, not nearly as fearful as she had been the first time around. They passed through the doors into "Admitting," my mother leaning on my father's arm as the labour pains intensified, the antiseptic smell and slightly rundown look of the hospital familiar and oddly welcoming as she walked resolutely in.

A nurse handed my father my mother's clothes in a brown paper bag and told him to go home. My father would have stayed

for the birth if they'd let him, but they didn't allow fathers in labour or delivery rooms in those days, so he told a joke to cover up his discomfort, kissed my mother goodbye, and went home with her underwear. They would soon telephone him with the good news, the nurse told him.

My mother was confident and as relaxed as one could be under the circumstances, but giving birth, like getting married, is one of those wild card moments in a woman's life. Once labour begins, you are not in control of either your body or your life; forces far greater than your puny will take over and deliver a child from your flesh, whether you like it or not. The pain rips through you and forces you to comply; the best you can do is accept it, breathe into it, go with it, accede to its rhythm. Then the pain can be yours, the incredible force of each muscular contraction can be yours, the power of birth can be yours in your own visceral moment of enlightenment as you align yourself with the forces of creation.

But my mother was now in the hands of a medical establishment that prevented such maternal epiphanies. Virtually all middle-class labouring women were sedated in those days. They went to sleep and woke up with a child – the stork brought it, for all they knew. That's what had happened two years earlier, when she had given birth to me. She had drifted into unconsciousness and the next thing she knew there I was, howling, the nurse wrapping me up tight, tight, tight in a towel. There had been no witnesses to my birth other than hospital staff, so there was no way to know what had actually transpired or even whose baby she had ended up with. My mother did not suffer the pain of my emergence; you could say I was born through her oblivion.

Later, my mother felt a vague sense of loss that she had not been conscious for my birth. It was as if it had been someone else's accomplishment, she later told me, the doctor's or the nurse's. But perhaps it was a mercy that she wasn't conscious that day when Martha was born, better for her not to have been alive to every moment of my sister's journey into life, to the incredible rush of encouragement and excitement when the

child's head crowned, and one shoulder emerged, and then the other, and then the rest of the tiny body issued forth in a sudden viscous blurt, followed by an awful moment of silence when the nurse and doctor looked into the infant's face. It would be far worse to push, push, push, and pop out what everyone regarded as a freak of nature with your own effort – at least if you just woke up with it, maybe there was some mistake. Maybe it didn't come from *you*.

The first people to stare at my sister were the doctor and the nurse.

The nurse whisked away the child, and then a hushed and indistinct conference took place just beyond my mother's ear-shot. *The flattened face and nose. The upturned eyes that did not belong in the face of a Caucasian child. The telltale single crease in the palm of the hand. The big space between the big toe and the next one.* This was no ordinary child. Or perhaps I should say no "normal" child.

They did not tell her right away. She was too drugged, and they wanted to confirm what they suspected. They spoke to my father first, but it was not the phone call he expected.



"She's so big and healthy!" my mother exclaimed proudly when the doctor and my father first entered her room. Then she saw the doctor's face.

She would always remember what he said next: "I'm afraid I have some bad news ... She's not as healthy as she looks," and then, "an abnormality ... genetic ... no cure."

The words coursed through her labour-shocked body, their toxin travelling straight to her heart. From an ever-widening distance she heard Dr. McIntosh suggest that the baby could be taken away immediately and sent to one of those institutions that housed such children. There, it would be better off with others of its own kind, and she would be relieved of the lifelong job of caring for it. This was a child who would never grow up, he said. It would never leave home to support itself

or raise its own family; it would always require extraordinary care and vigilance. My mother had her other children to think of, the one already born and the others yet to come, who would need her wholehearted motherly attention. She would undoubtedly go on to have more children, and she should not worry; they would all be normal. What had happened was a fluke, an accident, a freak of nature that thankfully was a rarity. If they took the child away now, my mother and father could quickly return to their normal lives and try again.

I imagine my mother lying in stunned and exhausted silence as she pondered the doctor's words. For nine months she alone had known this child as it grew inside her womb and drew nourishment from her blood, as it floated in the warmth of her own internal sea. How often she had spoken to it, rubbed its feet and buttocks as they pushed against her abdomen, heaved herself from one side to the other in the night, never complaining because she wanted this child, another child to love and a sibling for me.

My mother was a mother first and foremost. She asked to hold her child.

She took the blanketed bundle in her trembling arms and gazed into her daughter's face. The baby did not look too terribly different from other babies. Maybe the doctor had made a mistake. Maybe the child would be all right. Maybe the face had just been flattened in its passage through the birth canal and the eyes would soon resume their expected shape. Maybe she was confused and she would wake up from this nightmare and all would be as it should be, her daughter the beautiful second child she had imagined. But even as she struggled to reject the doctor's verdict, she knew somehow that it was true; the child seemed indefinably other, unalterably alien.

Birth anomalies had long been explained in European fairy tales through a similar motif: "Your precious babe is hence convey'd, and in the place a changeling laid."

My mother would never completely shake the feeling that she had been robbed ... or tricked ... that this was not her child.



Why is it so necessary for me to imaginatively revisit my mother's experience of my sister's birth? Because, in all our years together, my mother told me so little – except that this was one of the worst things that ever happened to her. Especially now that I am a mother, I need to understand both her feelings and her choices – and my father's – as best I can, since they had such a profound impact on my sister and me.

And so, in my mind's eye, I imagine her giving the baby to the nurse and turning her face to the wall, her heart now locked in a dead, dark place. No one dared to reach out to her or touch her. No one spoke. She could not, would not be its mother. It would be better if it were dead. Or if she were.

The doctor asked again: Did she want him to send it away? She could not answer, could not move. Did she want to discuss it with her husband? She did not answer.

Tears coursed down my father's cheeks, but my mother lay motionless, in a stupor, as the doctor patiently explained it. The problem was some sort of genetic aberration. There were new theories about the number of chromosomes in each gene, but nothing had been proven yet.

In fact, the exact cause of Down syndrome would not be definitely known until a year after my sister's birth, when Dr. Jérôme Lejeune in France and Patricia Jacobs in England proved almost simultaneously that Down syndrome was caused when the fetus received twenty-four instead of twenty-three chromosomes from a parent's egg or sperm, though a genetic cause had been suspected since 1932 and a trisomy (or triplication) of a chromosome since 1934. My sister was born with forty-seven chromosomes in every cell of her body, instead of forty-six, which resulted in various effects, both physical and mental ... though no two such children are ever the same.

I believe what my mother understood from Dr. McIntosh's explanation was that everything about her child was abnormal, that there was a "mistake" in every single cell of its body. And

if there was truly something unalterably, genetically wrong with it, if it was not fully human, then she did not want it.



If my sister was not fully human ... what was she? The words “moron,” “idiot,” and “imbecile” would cling to my sister all her life like Pig-Pen’s dirt. As with the word “retarded,” these words had once aimed for neutral, even scientific, description but became insults in the pejorative creep to which all attempts to describe mental disability eventually succumb – today’s “developmentally delayed” will likely go the same way. The roots of the words are telling. “Moron” comes from the Greek *moron*, the neuter form of *moros*, meaning foolish. The Greek word *idiotes* means not only an ignorant person but also a private person, a plebeian, or a layman, all derived from *idios*, “peculiar,” “private.” My sister was not technically an idiot, but from the moment of her birth she was relegated to a lower plane of existence that was both peculiar and private – the world of the subhuman. And the place where such creatures belonged was away.

No, in the eyes of the scientific experts of the time, my younger sister was not a moron or an idiot, but an imbecile. The term came from the Latin *imbecillus*, meaning weak or weak-minded. It referred not only to people with moderate to severe intellectual impairment but also to a type of criminal, a “moral imbecile.”

The doctors did not refer to my sister as an imbecile in front of my parents; everyone called her a “mongoloid,” a word first coined by John Langdon Haydon Down, the superintendent of the Earlswood Asylum for Idiots in Surrey, England, who in 1866 gave the first clinical description of the condition that would later bear his name. He chose this term because the epicanthic fold at the corner of the eyes of people with Down syndrome made them look vaguely Asian or Chinese. Reflecting the widespread scientific racism of the time, which held that

the Caucasian was intellectually superior to the Mongoloid race, Down theorized that such children suffered from arrested ethnic development: “There can be no doubt that these ethnic features are the result of degeneration.”

My mother was told shortly after my sister’s arrival that she would have an IQ of no more than 45. I know now that the degree of disability in people with Down syndrome varies widely, and it is not possible to measure the extent of cognitive impairment at birth. But doctors were the experts: their pronouncements had the terrible dismissive finality, the utter infallibility, of the judgments of the Old Testament Jehovah, and my parents, in their terror and ignorance, believed them.

We soon experienced the tyranny of another powerful word that affected us just as profoundly but did not draw attention to itself the way those other words did. For years, my family used it without thinking, since it seemed to describe something so obvious, so permanently inscribed in human nature, so natural and unchanging, that we never questioned it. We had no idea that the word “normal” had only entered the English language a hundred years earlier, when Adolphe Quetelet, in 1842, conjured up the average man, something that disability scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, in *Staring: How We Look*, would later call “a statistical phantom who stands in for us all.” Before the concept of the normal or statistically average person was invented, the common view, expressed particularly in the Bible, was that all human beings were flawed at birth. One aspired to an ideal of human perfection, to be sure, but no living person could possibly attain it. Humankind reflected the infinite diversity of God’s creation, even if the divine purpose in creating that variety remained inscrutable. God worked, it was said, in mysterious ways.

In the new, rational, and progressive world of the 1950s that my sister and I were born into, such mystery had been banished. On the one hand, North Americans imagined themselves as independent, unique, self-determining individuals; on the other, standardization proceeded apace, in universal education, mass production, mechanical reproduction of images, and advertising.

There were the normal people, as defined by science and statistics, who, it appeared, lived the only lives truly worth living – and then there were the deviants and failures. In the Cold War logic that prevailed through most of my childhood, these were enemy others who had to be contained. As Ian Hacking, a philosopher of science, comments in *The Social Construction of What?*, the word “normal” was “one of the most powerful ideological tools of the twentieth century.”



I imagine my mother lying alone and awake in her hospital bed in the depth of night, staring disbelievingly, uncomprehendingly through the half-opened door at the lights in the corridor. The hospital had given her a single room, out of consideration for her feelings, or perhaps it was so as not to scare the other mothers. Down the hall, she heard a mother-to-be moaning, and somewhere else a baby cried. All around her, women were giving birth, infants were taking their first gasping breaths, and husbands were greeting their offspring with excitement and joy. She heard footsteps and hushed voices in the corridor. *Were they talking about her? Was she the object of their pity or their scorn?*

In the dim light, she saw the outline of the flowers next to her bed and the cards that had already started to arrive.

Her breasts were filling with milk, and she knew she should nurse the baby.

Her eyes went to the call button. She could call and ask the nurse to fetch the child from the nursery. Or she could call and tell her to take it away. Her hand reached out, and then she sank back into the bed and closed her eyes. She didn't want the responsibility of making that decision.

But why had this happened to her? Why was she the loser in some horrid lottery, when all her friends were winners? Why should she alone be punished in this way? What had she done wrong?

She couldn't sleep. She pondered the dim outline of the empty chair beside her bed. She wished her husband could be there to

comfort her and share her pain. She wondered if he had already spoken to me. How would they explain it if the promised baby sister or brother never arrived? Could they pretend that it had died? What if they told me the truth – that the baby was sent away because something was wrong with it – would I then fear that I, too, might be sent away if something was wrong with me or if I misbehaved? Surely at two years old I was too young to understand any of this. Maybe I would just forget about the bump in Mummy's tummy and all that it portended, forget all the talk of a new baby in the house and the guest room that was now a nursery. But what if I stubbornly demanded my sister? What if I could not let go of the idea?

I know I was a determined, persistent child.

Maybe it would be better to bring the baby home, at least for a time, then send her someplace where we could all go visit her sometimes. I would learn the truth, and they would not have to lie to me. Perhaps, my mother reasoned, that was more comprehensible and just. But what would it mean for me to have such a sister? My mother did not want me to have a sister who could never keep me company, who would always be a burden and an embarrassment.

They could send the baby away and start over. Other people would be paid to care for it. Some people, people who were more selfless than she was, might even enjoy caring for such children. She was not selfless at all, she knew; quite the opposite. She would not be a martyr – no, she wanted her own life back. If there was a way out of this, she would take it. This was not her life.

But what of her poor, sad, helpless baby? She wondered if she could really send away her own flesh and blood to be cared for by strangers. How could she be certain they would take good care of her? What if she were mistreated? What would it mean to grow up without love, without family?

Whatever this baby was, she told herself finally, it had come from her; it was her own intimate issue, her mess, her mistake. Maybe she would be lucky, and it would die. They often died young. She knew she was a terrible person to wish this.

Or maybe she would somehow grow to love this child. Maybe it was possible.

She knew that she should nurse it. She knew she should not deprive her own flesh and blood of this protection and nourishment. She was still its mother. She could not abandon it, much as she wanted to, even if she wanted to more than she had ever wanted anything. But, somehow, she couldn't, at least not yet.

Maybe she would nurse it for nine months to give it a good start in life, and then she would send it out into the world. She would find someone else to take care of it and let it go. Maybe she was an unnatural mother to even think of this. So be it. She would be the unnatural mother of an unnatural child.

She called the nurse, and the nurse brought the dreaded bundle to her. The baby lay limply in her arms. It did not cry. Mechanically, she put the baby to her nipple and tried to nurse it. But the baby was uncoordinated. She called the nurse again and asked her to take it away. Better not to get too close. Better the bottle than the breast.



Once upon a time, the fairies came and stole a mother's beautiful, healthy child and left an ugly changeling in its place. The fairies often did so to preserve and improve their race as human milk was necessary for fairy children to survive.

The parents could force the return of their own child by treating the changeling cruelly. The human mother was advised to brutalize the changeling by tossing it into the fire or throwing it into the lake so that the fairies would relent and return her child.

But the mother refused to harm an innocent child, despite knowing its nature.

Her own child now lived in the fairy mound. The little girl would grow up to be a beautiful woman; she would marry a fairy prince and live with the fairy folk forever.

Copyright © 2019 Purich Books, an imprint of UBC Press

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without prior written permission of the publisher.

Cataloguing data is available from Library and Archives Canada.

ISBN 978-0-7748-8040-4 (softcover)

ISBN 978-0-7748-8041-1 (PDF)

ISBN 978-0-7748-8042-8 (EPUB)

ISBN 978-0-7748-8043-5 (Kindle)

Canada

UBC Press gratefully acknowledges the financial support for our publishing program of the Government of Canada (through the Canada Book Fund), the Canada Council for the Arts, and the British Columbia Arts Council.

Interior design: Irma Rodriguez

Set in Alright Sans, Baskerville 10, and Walbaum

by Artegraphica Design Co. Ltd.

Copy editor: Lesley Erickson

Proofreader: Judith Earnshaw

Overleaf: Martha's mother holding her sister Kate, with Victoria, shortly after Martha's institutionalization, 1960.

Purich Books, an imprint of UBC Press

2029 West Mall

Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z2

www.purichbooks.ca