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The Humorous Reminiscences of an
Alternative Medical Practitioner

Jan de Vries



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Jan de Vries

*The
Humorous
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Medical Practitioner*

Illustrations by PETER FOYLE



EDINBURGH AND LONDON

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The names of characters in this book and certain events described therein have been altered to avoid any possible embarrassment to the individuals concerned.

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Useful Addresses

Alternative Medicine Man

Gin ye should spiflicate yer spine
And yints are jerkit oot o' line,
Frae pain, alas, there's nae release,
Until ye gang tae Jan de Vries.

Ye suffer torture in yer kyte,
For weeks yer in an awfu plight;
And scunnert, noo, wi castor ile,
It's time ye gaed tae Auchenkyle.

Yer girth is forty inches roon,
Yer wecht, ye canna get it doon;
And ten tae wan it will increase,
Unless ye gang tae Jan de Vries.

Ye hae arthritis in yer banes
And walkin racks ye, fu' o' pains;
But skeich ye'd be tae rin a mile,
Gin ye wad gang tae Auchenkyle.

Gin ye're afflictit unco sair
And doakters dinna help nae mair,
Yer aches and pains will a' decrease,
When in the hauns o' Jan de Vries.

Ye've smokit fags for mony a year,
The consequences, noo, ye fear;
Ye needna swither for a while,
It's time ye rung up Auchenkyle.

It's faur ower late tae hope and pray;
Get on the phone withoot delay!
When contemplatin yer decease,
Yer only hope is Jan de Vries!

John Boyd (a patient)



1

Her Fatal Attraction

WEEK IN, WEEK out, she used to come into town on her old bike and at the end of her shopping trip she would call into the pharmacy. The two bags hanging on either side of the luggage carrier of her bike would be loaded to overflowing with provisions. She would always arrive at our pharmacy at lunch-time. Her name was Mrs Clean, although this in itself was a laugh, as she did not do her name justice. By anyone's standards she was far from clean and, dare I say it, she was also far from attractive.

Every week she called into the pharmacy for the same errand and it was usually me who was sent down to serve her. Our pharmacy was in a very old building in a lovely old town in the Netherlands. The stock-room was on a different

level to the shop itself. For obvious reasons, the dispensary bordered the stock-rooms. Let us not forget that in those days most prescriptions had to be individually prepared by the pharmacist; powders had to be mixed and pills were handmade. Few medicines were available ready-made on demand from the pharmaceutical manufacturers or wholesalers.

When there were no customers in the shop, the staff would usually be busy upstairs helping out. Whenever a customer opened the door to the shop, a bell would ring and someone would make their way down. We could see what was happening in the shop and who was entering through a plate-glass window . . . and as I remember it, it always seemed to be me who was sent down when Mrs Clean called in.

At that time I was not yet qualified. I could handle most counter sales as these rarely caused any problems, but I could always call in another member of the staff if I did encounter any difficulty. As Mrs Clean always made the same purchase, she was an easy customer.

On this occasion, however, after I had served her as usual, Mrs Clean took her time and looked around before starting to leave the premises. Then she came back to the counter. Self-consciously she approached me with the words: "Could I ask you for some personal advice?"

Although greatly taken aback, of course I assured her that I would try to be of help. Please remember that I was still very young and inexperienced. I was therefore flabbergasted when I heard her question. If only I had had the sense to call another member of staff at that point, but no such luck!

She proceeded to tell me that her husband was considerably older than herself and that they had several children. However, every day after supper her husband felt amorous and wanted to retire with her. She blushed while telling me that she had become less and less inclined to

give in to his amorous demands and therefore it appeared that she was unable to perform to his expectations. I tried to cover up my embarrassment by appearing to think deeply on the matter but, as if this were a request for further information, she continued by supplying me with even more personal details.

By now shivers were running up and down my spine and I decided, there and then, that I never wanted to have anything whatsoever to do with sex. Suffice to say, that one is entitled to change one's mind when growing up!

However, the big question remained: how on earth was I going to answer her? By that time I felt definitely too entangled to nip up the stairs and involve any of the other staff. I imagine that it would usually have been my aunt, who was the pharmacist, who would deal with any questions in this field, but things had gone too far for me to go and call her down. I would have had to give her an explanation and even the thought of doing so made me feel embarrassed. I then decided to take the bull by the horns and suggested that Mrs Clean purchase some tranquillisers for her husband.

When Mrs Clean informed me that he would never willingly agree to take a tranquillising tablet, I went further and suggested that she administer it surreptitiously. How about pulverising a tablet and adding it to his porridge?

She duly purchased a bottle of tranquillisers and left the premises. Whatever happened after that is anyone's guess, but I never saw Mrs Clean again. My colleagues often wondered what might have happened to her, as she had been such a regular customer for so long — once a week at lunchtime. Believe me, I never let on about what I considered at one time to have been a most delicate situation!



2

Bird Brains

ONE DAY, two little boys came up to the counter in the pharmacy where I was doing my apprenticeship. I knew them as the two young sons of a well-to-do local gentleman farmer. Timidly, they asked me for something with which to wash the sparrows' hair. I thought that I must have misunderstood what they meant and therefore asked them to repeat themselves. Still none the wiser, I explained to them that nature takes care of that and sparrows do not need to be washed as rainwater does this quite effectively. I also explained that sparrows have feathers, not hair.

"Our sparrows have hair," insisted the older of the pair.