**For to make a drink that men call dwale to
make a man sleep while men carve him:**

Take three spoonfuls of the gall of a barrow swyne
and for a woman of a gylte, three
spoonfuls of hemlock juice, three spoonfuls of
ye wild neep, three spoonfuls of letuce,
three spoonfuls of pape, three spoonfuls
of henbane, and three spoonfuls of eysyl
and mix them all together and boil
them a little and put them in a glass vessel
well stopped and put thereof three spoonfuls into
a potel of good wine and mix it well
together. When it is needed, let
him that shall be carved sit against a
good fire and make him to drink
thereof until he fall asleep and then may
right you safely carve him, and when
you have done the cure and would have him
to awaken, take vinegar and salt and
wash well his temples and his cheekbones
and he shall awake from rest.

and we must therefore consider how they might have been used. A clue is to be found in Chaucer's reference, in the Reeve's tale, to a medieval "ménage à trois":

To bedde went the daughter right soon,
To bedde goth Aleyn and also John,
There was no more—they needed no dwale.

During medieval times, it was to the monastery and almshouse that poor people turned for healing. The better off (and more literate) middle classes received treatment in their own homes, and dwale recipes are found not in medical or religious texts but rather in domestic remedy books—small notebooks of household hints, such as the one being consulted in figure 4.¹⁶ Who then might have administered these early anaesthetics? It certainly would not have been the surgeons themselves, for in spite of Thomas Middleton's lines, medieval surgeons only ever referred to "sleeping medicines" to warn against their use.^{3 12} Almost certainly it would have been ordinary housewives, caring for loved ones who had, perhaps, returned home injured from the wars. How many would in due course have had cause to regret their actions we can only guess.

Sleeping drinks went out of fashion before the arrival of the printed word but were not completely

forgotten about, and their legacy survives today in the role they came to play in Elizabethan drama. Perhaps the most ingenious example is the explanation given by Barabas, in Christopher Marlowe's play *The Jew of Malta*, of how he managed to escape from captivity:

I drank of poppy and cold mandrake juice
And being asleep, belike they thought me dead,
And threw me over the walls.

Barabas eventually regained consciousness, but the outlook for those who took "drowsy syrups" in real life would have been less certain. Although these recipes were rightly abandoned many centuries ago, they can teach us much, even today. They remind us, for example, of the links that once existed between medicine and magic; that, as Shakespeare tells us, "in poison there is physic"; and that much medical advance in the 20th century has come not from new drugs but rather from our ability to measure and administer old ones accurately. At the dawning of a new millennium they serve to remind us, once again, of the enormous debt we owe to the past.

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Alien babies

One Saturday afternoon two golfers in Drogheda found what they believed to be a fetus near a waste bin in the car park of their golf course. The Gardai (police) and a local priest were called. The "find" was brought to the local casualty department, where a doctor inspected it. The case was referred to the coroner, and on Monday morning the find was examined by a pathologist. It was immediately clear that it was not human, the first impression being that it was an octopus. Having removed the little adherent grit it became apparent that it was a silicone alien-type doll (figure) on sale in toy shops as Millennium Babies. It later transpired that the Gardai had noted the odd eyes and big pointed ears; the doctor in casualty had noted the long umbilical cord; and the two golfers were a vet and a medical doctor.

Such an occurrence is not limited to Ireland. The next week there was a headline in *The Star* newspaper: "Fetus" was little green toy." An observant gasman in Devizes saw what seemed to be a dead fetus lying in the gutter on the road. The police were called in, and they in turn asked a local GP to take a look. He thought it should be examined by a pathologist. The specimen was covered in straw (Wiltshire being an agricultural county), had a large head, big pointed ears, and four identical limbs. It was a dark grey colour and felt rubbery. One little midline incision in the mortuary revealed all—it was a toy.

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