

# BABY'S BLUES

*Tammy Ryan*

**BROADWAY PLAY PUBLISHING INC**

150 W. 47th St, NY NY 10036 (212) 772-8334

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[BroadwayPlayPubl.com](http://BroadwayPlayPubl.com)

BABY'S BLUES

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First printing: November 2006

I S B N: 0-88145-316-1

Book design: Marie Donovan

Word processing: Microsoft Word

Typographic controls: Ventura Publisher

Typeface: Palatino

Printed and bound in the U S A

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tammy Ryan's plays have been produced in Pittsburgh where she is based, and nationally at such theaters as The Alliance Theater Company, Florida Stage, The Peoples Light and Theater Company and Stamford Theater Works.

Plays include *BABY'S BLUES*, commissioned by The Rep, Point Park University's professional theater company; *PIG*, produced by 29th Street Rep; and *THE MUSIC LESSON*, which received the American Alliance of Theater in Education Distinguished New Play Award in 2004.

Ryan is a recipient of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Fellowship, the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust's Creative Achievement Award, and a Creative Heights grant from the Vira I Heinz Endowment.

The first production of BABY'S BLUES was performed at The Pittsburgh Playhouse by The Rep, the professional theater company of Point Park University (Ronald Allan-Lindblom, Artistic Producing Director) opening on 27 October 2005. The cast and creative contributors were:

SUSAN ..... Melanie Julian  
MARCÉ ..... Greg Longenhagen  
GRANDMA ..... Barbara Burney  
GIRL ..... Chesley Shannon  
DOCTOR ..... Eve Amplas  
DAVID ..... Paul Ford, Jr  
TERRI ..... Janelle Baker  
*Director* ..... Sheila McKenna  
*Set & costume design* ..... Pei-Chi Su  
*Lighting design* ..... Jennifer Ford, PhD  
*Sound design* ..... Elizabeth Atkinson  
*Doll design* ..... Tavia LaFollette  
*Production stage manager* ..... Kim Martin

## CHARACTERS

SUSAN, *mid thirties first time mother*

MARCÉ, *a French nineteenth century physician, mid thirties*

GRANDMA, *SUSAN's mother, early sixties, lives in Florida*

GIRL, *SUSAN's ten year-old self, (actress in her twenties who can play ten)*

DOCTOR, *female, pediatrician in her early thirties*

DAVID, *SUSAN's husband, late thirties*

TERRI, *SUSAN's co-worker and best friend, late thirties*

*Note on Characters: MARCÉ, GRANDMA and GIRL are parts of SUSAN's inner world representing different aspects of her psyche and seen only by SUSAN. The DOCTOR, DAVID and TERRI exist in the outside reality.*

*The character of MARCÉ was inspired by LOUIS VICTOR MARCÉ (1828-1864). A 19th century French physician who in 1858 published a work entitled, Treatise on the insanity of pregnant, newly delivered and nursing mothers.*

*The authority on post-partum illness for a hundred years, MARCÉ was the first to sense that it was an organic illness. Later his work would be misquoted to prove the opposite, that post-partum depression and psychosis do not differ from depression and psychosis at any other time in a woman's life. The subject continues to be debated.*

## NOTES FOR PRODUCTION

Scenes should move swiftly without breaks, frequent blackouts, or intermission. Don't feel the need for realism. For example, baby bathtub can be enormous. The monitor can turn on and off by itself. Rely on lights and especially sound, i.e. water rushing in tub, the roar of static from baby monitor, surreal baby sounds, etc. Sound functions as another character in the play, revealing SUSAN's inner world while at the same time pushing the action forward.

The baby itself can be represented in a variety of ways, however, it should be obvious the baby is *not real*, and is blatantly a doll, puppet, or whatever. In the first production, the babies were represented by a series of dolls wrapped in silk like material. At the start of the play, when SUSAN gives birth, a scarlet scarf was pulled out of her. The first baby was wrapped in this scarlet material; each subsequent baby gradually went from scarlet to pink to white by the end of the play. This, is one solution.

With regard to the set, non-naturalistic works best, although as with real babies, lots of props come into play. The set design should facilitate the revelation (and storage) of these, as well as quick transformations from scene to scene. The original production was played in the round, literally enclosing the audience inside SUSAN's point of view. However it's staged, the production's design should create opportunities for surprises and facilitate the shifting reality.

for Devan and Dallas



## PROLOGUE

*(At rise: In dim light, a very pregnant woman rocks slowly back and forth establishing a rhythm that doesn't break except where indicated. Before we see her clearly, we hear her voice as if hearing her thoughts running like a stream of water. Her entire speech should be taped, until indicated otherwise. She is writing in a journal)*

SUSAN: *(Voiceover)* Someone else's dream. That's it. I feel like I am dreaming someone else's dream. Is that the baby? That tenacious octopus floating warm and silent inside me, refusing to come out after *forty-two weeks*. Dreaming? *(Stops rocking, groaning, as baby moves inside)* An ocean rolling, a tsunami starting on the other side of the world...ending...here. *(Starts rocking)* This is claustrophobic. This feeling. Like I can't get out. Is that me? Or the baby? *(Pause)* Try to think. I can't get out of what's coming up ahead. It's inevitable: "how-is-she-going-to-get-out?" Either, she's going to push, tear, grind her way out, down there, cracking my bones apart as she goes, emptying me out. Like shit. *(Beat)* I hope that doesn't happen. *(Beat)* But it's natural, isn't it? That's Nature. The life force. Squeezing me inside out like a ripe peach. Or, if something goes wrong, someone is going to, oh god, more fruit metaphors, split me open like a cantaloupe— *(Stops rocking, staring at walls)* I hate this wallpaper. Whose idea was this wallpaper? The color is making me sick. The baby is going to take one look at that wallpaper and start screaming. What was I thinking, yellow wallpaper? Why didn't I paint it a bright happy color like lilac? How long would it take to rip it down and start over?

*(She is standing looking at wall, then)* Where is my bliss?  
 I was supposed to be so fucking happy. I never glowed.  
 What bullshit. I hate being pregnant. It's like being held  
 hostage. All you can think is when, when am I going to  
 be free again? *(Softening, relaxing during the following)*  
 Although I did have that dream. I need to remember it.  
*(Back to rocking chair, writing in journal)* The most  
 amazing technicolor dream. Bright pink naked, my  
 huge belly in front of me, I stepped into an icy pool  
 of aquamarine. My mother, of all people, was already  
 in the pool, as I watched my thighs immersed bright  
 pink under the absolute clarity of that water. Another  
 woman, my grandmother, in the pool, too. And a little  
 farther off, there were more women, smaller and  
 darker, dotting the way toward an open sea. I smiled at  
 my mother but she wasn't looking at me, she was facing  
 the other way— *(Suddenly tender, touching her belly,*  
*tearing up)* Little fish. When it's your turn, I will smile  
 at you, I promise. Please God, let her be all right. Yes,  
 when the baby gets here, when it gets out, I'll be better  
 then. *(Suddenly the sound of something elastic breaking, like*  
*a "pong")* Uhn. *(Speaking for the first time: surprised and*  
*confused)* ...I'm all wet. *(Dawning on her what this means,*  
*the voiced thoughts continue)* Oh no, oh no, oh no, not yet,  
 I take it back, I take it all back, I'm not ready, I didn't  
 finish my Lamaze class, I don't know what to do, I'm  
 not ready— *(She stands up, dropping journal and pen, then*  
*suddenly doubles over with a contraction, when it passes,*  
*she screams out loud.)* Daaaviiid!!

*(Lights black out on scream, in the transition the sounds of*  
*her labor, with words woven in, spoken apart, like the taped*  
*thoughts.)*

VOICED THOUGHTS: I am turning something pressing  
 black space I am disappearing into. I can't. I am not.  
 I am pressing into black opening up. I am falling.  
 Out of myself.

*(The labor sounds climax, with the dissonant notes of a twisted lullaby in the darkness.)*

### Scene One

*(The sound of running water. She is in a hospital bed. She wakes up and sees, sitting in the only chair in the room in the corner, a small man in his early thirties. He is dressed like a nineteenth century physician. He speaks French [translation on page 66])*

MARCÉ: *Bonjour, Madame. Comment vous sentez-vous? Non ne parlez pas. Restez couchée, vous avez fourni un gros effort ce soir. Reposez-vous quand il est encore temps.*

SUSAN: I left the water running in the sink.

MARCÉ: *(Frowning slightly, touches her forehead, clucks his tongue) Légère fièvre, une sueur épaisse couvre le visage. Le visage est pâle, enflé, l'expression hébétée, le pouls est rapides, dites ahhh, (He sticks his tongue out, she imitates him) La langue est chargée, je peux? (He begins to palpate her uterus) L'utérus est hypertrophié, tendre, oui, mais retrouvera sa forme normale. Je recommande le sommeil. Et de longs bains chauds, le temps se chargera du reste. Y a-t-il quelqu'un qui puisse vous persuader de prendre soin de vous?*

SUSAN: I don't speak french.

MARCÉ: *(In heavily accented English) We must ask the question: what is the connection between the uterus and the mind?*

*(MARCÉ exits. The ten year old GIRL enters from a corner and sits in the seat MARCÉ vacated. Right behind her, is GRANDMA pushing the cart with the baby on it. GRANDMA picks up the swaddled infant and starts patting its bottom. The girl cracks open a can of ginger ale. SUSAN sits up.)*

## Scene Two

GRANDMA: *(In a thick Brooklyn/Queens accent)* Then I noticed these little “stawks” which I’d never noticed before, running up and down the beach on these skinny little legs. I don’t know why I never noticed them before, cause there were packs of them running up and down the beach. Egrits, I think they call em. They are so cute. *(To baby)* And so are you. There you go, back in your little casserole dish.

*(AS soon as GRANDMA puts down the baby, the GIRL runs to the cart, peering at baby)*

GIRL: *(Under their exchange)* Can I hold her?

SUSAN: What are you talking about?

GIRL: Can I hold her?

GRANDMA: Stawks. Little teeny stawks with skinny legs.

GIRL: Can I hold her?

SUSAN: Stalks? What are they—like plants?

GIRL: Let me hold her.

GRANDMA: *No! Stawks, stawks, what’s the matter with you, (Giving the GIRL a look)* the birds that bring the babies.

SUSAN: You mean, stork?

GIRL: She means sex. *(Snorkeling in her gingerale)*

GRANDMA: You don’t know about that and stop drinking soda, you’ll get fat. *(To SUSAN)* They’re called egrits.

SUSAN: I thought you weren’t coming.

GRANDMA: *(To the baby)* Ah well, you’ll survive, just like we all survived what our poor mothers did to us.

SUSAN: What does that mean?

GRANDMA: Oh you know, all the mistakes you're gonna make. She'll overcome it, just like we did.

SUSAN: We did.

GRANDMA: Yes we did. And you will too, my little dorito.

GIRL: Burrito! The nurse said she looked like a little burrito, not dorito. (*Looks at SUSAN like, isn't GRANDMA crazy!?*)

GRANDMA: Just so long as we don't put you in the oven by mistake. (*Looks at SUSAN*) How are you feeling?

SUSAN: I haven't taken a shower or bowel movement in forty-eight hours, I have a headache, my stitches hurt and I feel like I am falling off the edge of the world.

GRANDMA: Where is that doctor? Has anybody come to check you out?

SUSAN: She wants me to nurse her.

GRANDMA: The nurse came?

SUSAN: No, the pediatrician, she was here before you showed up. She wants me to breastfeed.

GIRL: Ew.

GRANDMA: You're not gonna.

SUSAN: I don't know. It hurt.

GRANDMA: It's *barbaric*.

SUSAN: It's supposed to be best for the baby.

GRANDMA: So is living in the Taj Mahal. I didn't "breastfeed" you and you survived. Besides she liked her bottle just fine.

SUSAN: You gave her a bottle?

GRANDMA: You were sleeping when I came in; she was hungry and she sucked it right down.

*(Before SUSAN can protest, the DOCTOR enters. She is about the same age as SUSAN, mid-thirties, polite but reserved, professional, but not cold)*

DOCTOR: *(To SUSAN)* Morning, Mom. How are we feeling?

SUSAN: Hi.

GRANDMA: Finally.

DOCTOR: I checked the baby when she was in the nursery.

SUSAN: Is she all right?

DOCTOR: She's fine. You make good babies. And how's Mom doing?

SUSAN: She's a little tired.

DOCTOR: Bet you feel like you ran the marathon. Hahaha. I noticed, in the nursery, it said you were bottlefeeding.

SUSAN: Did it?

DOCTOR: Could I convince you to breastfeed instead?

GRANDMA: I don't think so.

*(Pause)*

SUSAN: I don't think I could.

DOCTOR: We could make it work.

GRANDMA: *(Snorting)* We.

DOCTOR: Unless you feel strongly about it, I would urge you to try breastfeeding, even for a few weeks, it's best for baby.

GRANDMA: I raised six kids on corn syrup and evaporated milk I boiled right on the stove and they turned out all right.

SUSAN: I tried, I couldn't do it.

DOCTOR: You haven't given it a chance. But you want to do what's comfortable for you.

GRANDMA: It's gonna be hard enough without adding that.

SUSAN: I'm feeling a little overwhelmed at the moment.

DOCTOR: Sure.

GRANDMA: Do you have children?

DOCTOR: (*Writing down, SUSAN's "answer"*) No.

GRANDMA: Didn't think so.

DOCTOR: Is there someone to help you?

GRANDMA: I live in Florida now and I love it. I lived all my life in New York, but then I couldn't take the winters no more. Of course I wanted to see the baby. But I can't be cold anymore. She has a husband. Let him help her. After all he had something to do with this.

DOCTOR: When you get home?

GIRL: I'll help her.

SUSAN: My husband.

DOCTOR: Good.

SUSAN: He had to go buy a car seat. She was a little early; we weren't ready....

GRANDMA: Last minute Davey.

DOCTOR: I understand. But he will be here to take you home? Because you'll need help in the beginning. You'll get a brochure that explains all this when they release you, but I can tell you, you should stay off your feet as

much as possible, get as much rest as you can. Let others do the household chores, cook dinner, do the laundry. You only take care of your baby and yourself. If you have any questions don't hesitate to call. Even stupid questions. Hahaha. That's what we're here for.

SUSAN: Thank you.

DOCTOR: Beautiful baby. You did a good job.

GRANDMA: Little dorito is perfect.

SUSAN: (*Tearing up*) Thank you.

DOCTOR: (*Not unsympathetic*) Now comes the hard part.

(DAVID, SUSAN's husband enters. He is harried but exhilarated. He is carrying bags of food and a carseat)

DOCTOR: Oh Good, Congratulations, Dad. The two of you make good babies. Have more. Hahahaha.

(GIRL sneaks another can of gingerale from Susan's tray)

GRANDMA: You're gonna rot out your teeth.

DAVID: If I can survive her having them. She sucker punched me in the delivery room.

SUSAN: Are you still mad about that?

DAVID: I told you I'm not mad. It just wasn't what I was expecting at that moment. "Okay, honey, you're ready to push:" *pow*.

GRANDMA: You don't want to antagonize him, you're gonna need his help.

DOCTOR: Transition's always pretty tricky. If they had guns in the delivery room there'd be a lot of dead husbands. Hahaha. And maybe a few less obstetricians. That's why pediatricians stay out of the delivery room. Hahahaha. We only deal with the end product, not the process. Hahaha. Take good care of that baby. See you

in two weeks. Unless, of course, we need to see her sooner.

*(She exits.)*

GRANDMA: Product. Like she's a box of cereal. *(Eyes DAVID)* My husband, blind drunk in some bar during the event, always arrived at the hospital with flowers.

DAVID: I know my wife, *(Kisses her)* she wants food.

SUSAN: I'm not hungry.

GIRL: I am.

GRANDMA: I'll just pick at whatever you brought.

DAVID: How about a smile?

SUSAN: How about it?

*(Baby suddenly starts crying. It's a horrible sound, goes right through you. They all look at the baby, then at SUSAN. GRANDMA starts eating, GIRL joins her)*

DAVID: What do we do?

GRANDMA: Breastfeed her. Hahahahaha. *(Gnawing on chicken leg)* Pick her up. She's your baby.

*(SUSAN, tentatively, terrified, picks the baby up like a bundle of fragile glass)*

DAVID: Watch her neck!

SUSAN: I am!

*(SUSAN holds the baby, who continues to cry. They all watch her. SUSAN looks to them for guidance. There is nothing but chewing from GRANDMA. The GIRL stands up as if to help but doesn't move. DAVID knows this is not his call. Then the GIRL opens drawer under baby's glass bed, pulls out bottle. She hands it to SUSAN who puts it in baby's mouth. Immediate quiet.)*

GRANDMA: Good girl.

(GRANDMA and GIRL polish off wings. DAVID stands awkwardly, not sure what his role is. SUSAN looks like she is feeding the baby poison, but the baby is indeed "sucking it down." SUSAN holds up empty bottle.)

SUSAN: That was too fast.

(Baby starts wailing again)

GRANDMA: (Mouth full) Burp 'er.

SUSAN: What?

(GIRL belches)

GRANDMA: Burp her. Hahahaha.

DAVID: Let me see if I can catch the doctor. (Exits)

(SUSAN puts baby to her shoulder and very lightly pats her back)

GRANDMA: Oh for godsake.

(GRANDMA wipes her hands, takes baby, throws her against her shoulder and whacks her three times. GIRL watches as she finishes eating, etc. Baby burps. All of SUSAN's confidence crumbles in this moment)

GRANDMA: See.

(GRANDMA hands baby back to SUSAN who looks pale)

GRANDMA: What's the matter with you? (Touches her forehead) You're all clammy.

GIRL: Is she sick?

GRANDMA: She just had a baby. Her organs are re-adjusting. She'll be fine.

(DAVID returns)

DAVID: I couldn't find her. Oh, she's quiet.

SUSAN: (Smiling with relief) She's sleeping.

DAVID: You look like a natural Mother already.

SUSAN: Yeah?

GRANDMA: Put her down; don't want to spoil her.

DAVID: She seems to sleep a lot.

GRANDMA: Don't get used to it.

DAVID: Oh! I almost forgot. Your Mom sent this. *(Hands her a wrapped package, and begins packing up everything)*

GRANDMA: Nothin big. I know how you like to write in your diary.

SUSAN: Oh...it's a journal...how pretty.

GRANDMA: It's a baby diary, so you can write everything down when it happens so you don't forget. And no one can accuse you of anything that didn't happen later.

*(DAVID with his arms full of flowers and baby things)*

DAVID: I'm gonna start loading up the car with some of this stuff now, so everything will be set up for you when you get home. I'll be right back. *(He exits, then quickly returns.)* I love you. *(He kisses her, then)* Are you sure about not breastfeeding? *(At the look on her face)* Okay, then I'm gonna take some of this formula. This shit is expensive. But whatever you want to do, is okay by me. I'll be back. *(Kisses her again, then runs out)*

SUSAN: *(Tearing up again; to GRANDMA)* I wish you were really here.

GRANDMA: *(Tearing up too)* My baby.

GIRL: Can I hold her now?

*(A woman enters with flowers and baby balloons and a bright yellow gift bag)*

TERRI: Susan?

*(GRANDMA and GIRL exit.)*

SUSAN: Terri.

TERRI: I saw David going down the hall with all those flowers! Here's some more! Hey Suze, are you crying?

SUSAN: No, no, no.

TERRI: Hey you just had a baby, cry if you want to.

SUSAN: It was nice of you to visit.

TERRI: My best friend just had a baby, of course I'm going to visit— Oh my gosh, Susan she is beautiful. I can't believe you had a baby!

SUSAN: Me neither.

TERRI: Are you so happy you can't stand it?

SUSAN: That's right.

TERRI: Everybody says congratulations. (*Peering at baby in SUSAN's arms*) Oh my, Susan. How are you ever going to go back to work with this precious little thing at home? So, how was labour? Was it horrible?

SUSAN: I don't have the words for it.

TERRI: Is it true what they say, you forget?

SUSAN: I don't—feel right, Terri.

TERRI: (*Looks at her a moment, then*) You just had a baby! Give yourself a chance to recover!

SUSAN: I never had a baby before. I don't know what to do!

TERRI: Don't worry when you get home, your maternal instinct will kick in. Hey, call me, I'll come over on weekends, I mean it. I'll get my baby fix and you can take a nap or whatever. Since it doesn't look like there are any babies on my horizon. A man is usually required. That's all right. Can I hold her?

SUSAN: Sure.

*(SUSAN passes her the baby)*

TERRI: She's so light. Like a bag of feathers. Oh, look at the tiny fingernails. *(Referring to yellow bag)* That's for you, since I missed the shower. If you already have one I can return it. It's a baby monitor, of course you have one, I can bring it back. What do you need, I'll get you whatever you need.

SUSAN: I don't know what I need.

TERRI: I'll return it.

SUSAN: No, no, no, that's okay. I'm sure I can always use another one, thank you, Terri.

TERRI: *(Gently handing her back the baby)* This way Mama will hear you no matter where she is in the house. I'm so happy for you. You're a mother now.

*(TERRI's Words "You're a mother now" have a strange hollow, echoey sound. The wind picks up)*

SUSAN: Is it snowing outside?

TERRI: It was starting to. Flurries. Nothing to worry about. *("Nothing to worry about" has the echoey sound)*

SUSAN: *(To baby)* Nothing to worry about.

*(Fade to black)*