

Conversations in Baby Blue

by N. J. Lindquist

Sixteen-year-old Susan Howatt opened her eyes to a faded print of the Madonna and Child hanging on a pale pink wall. A baby was crying nearby—just outside her door. The noise must have awakened her.



A tremor ran through her as she realized she was in a hospital room and the crying baby might be hers.

A kaleidoscope of fragmented memories formed in Susan's mind. The suspicions, the tight feeling in her throat, the cold, clutching fear. Then the doctor's words—nine weeks pregnant.

The agony of telling Pete. His absurd, "Are you sure?" Incredulity giving way to accusation. In the end, weary submission. The impossible had happened. To them.

Her parents' stunned looks. Not their quiet, obedient, straight As daughter! Of course they'd never really cared for Pete. But they'd trusted Susan. Bonnie, maybe. Susan's twin was much more inclined to rebellion and rashness. Susan remembered Bonnie's disbelieving, "But didn't you use the pill?"

All the tears and quarrels and making-up. The soul-searching. Abortion. Adoption. Running away. Marriage. Finally, the decision to keep the baby.

Poor Pete. At seventeen, not exactly ready to step into the role of father. Sometimes wishing he'd never seen her. And yet standing by. Going with her to pre-natal classes. Coaching her in the labour room. Awkwardly patting her hair and saying, "You did it!"

Susan was pulled out of her reverie by footsteps coming into the room. Pete was there, wearing a sweat shirt and jeans, his hair needing a comb. He stood at the end of the bed and for a second neither spoke. Then Susan said “Hi.”

“How ya doin’?”

“Pretty good, I guess.”

“The doctor said you did great. He said six hours of labour was good, and you had a pretty easy delivery.”

“Easy for him to say.”

Pete grinned. “They brought him down for you to see yet?”

“No.”

“They said they would.”

“I just woke up. I was so tired.”

“Yeah, me too.”

“Sit down.”

He sat in the single faded arm-chair, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees. “You seen your mom and dad yet?”

“No. You did call them, didn’t you?”

“Yeah.”

“How did they sound?”

“Excited. You mom said she’d hoped it would be a boy.”

Susan smiled.

A green-clad nurse came into the room with a cheerful, “Hi, Susan, how are you feeling?”

Susan forced a smile. “Okay, I guess.”

“Something like a dishrag after it’s been wrung?”

A genuine smile appeared. “Close.”

“Well, don’t worry, it won’t last long. What we want to do now is get you up and let you have a bath and get your bed changed. Then it will be lunch time.” She turned her back to get a basin and Susan stuck out her tongue.

“Can you come back in about half an hour?” The nurse asked Pete. He made a face, but kissed Susan lightly on the cheek and left.

Half an hour later, after Susan had bathed and changed and been tucked back into her freshly-made bed, she heard familiar footsteps approaching. Her heartbeat quickened as a petite blonde woman and a comfortably stout man came in. They exclaimed at how little time had elapsed between her phone call to Pete for him to come and get her and Pete's call to say the baby was born.

They had flowers, too. From them, from her aunts and uncles, and from her grandmother. Blue flowers in dainty blue booties and lambs.

"Can we see the baby? Will they bring him or what?"

"They said they'd bring him, but they haven't. Maybe you should go to the nursery and ask."

When they had gone, Susan lay still, thinking of all the turmoil caused by this tiny being who was hers. Her son. What a funny word. Susan and Pete's son.

And then he was in the room. Frowning, her mom placed him in Susan's arms. "Be careful. You have to hold his head."

"I know, mom. Pete and I went to the classes, remember?"

"Yes, of course, but you seem so young to have a baby."

It was true, of course. And at thirty-five, her mother was far too young to be a grandmother.

Her parents stayed until a nurse came to take the baby back to the nursery. Then they left quickly. Her dad had to get back to his office and her mom had an appointment at the hair salon.

Susan fell asleep.

She was just beginning to wake up when Pete came in. "It must be nice to be some people," he teased.

"Some people just had a baby."

"If they did, they must have been crazy."

Pete leaned over and kissed her lightly. Then he set his books on the end of the bed and sat in the armchair. "You've sure got a big mouth for a sister."

Susan sat up. "Why?"

“By the time I got to school after dinner, she’d already told everybody about the baby. I figure it’s my kid, I should be the one who tells everybody. But not with her around.”

“I guess she didn’t think.”

“I bet she did it on purpose. I told you she doesn’t like me.”

“You don’t like her either.”

“Don’t say anything to her. Don’t give her the satisfaction of knowing she bugged me.”

“Okay.”

There was silence for a few minutes. Pete undid his jacket. “Old man Watson congratulated me. What a laugh! All the guys were talking and I was giving out some cigars I bought, and so Ron asks Watson if he’s heard that Susan had a baby, and so everybody’s staring at him and he had to say something, so he says, ‘Congratulations, Peter’, and you could tell it killed him to say it. What a laugh!”

Susan didn’t say anything for a moment. Then she asked quietly, “Does the whole school know?”

“I guess. You can’t keep something like that a secret. Bonnie said most kids realized when you changed schools that something was up.”

“Yes, I guess so.” She changed the subject, “Do you have homework?”

“Watson gave us a whole bunch of junk. Likely on purpose because he knew I wouldn’t do it.”

“You will so do it.”

“The heck I will. It isn’t every day my girl has a kid. He should be good for at least one free night.”

“I’ll help you with it.”

“Here?”

“Why not?”

So they spent the next hour working on Pete’s homework. Then Susan’s supper tray was brought in and Pete went home for his own supper. “See you later,” he said as he snatched

the cookies from her tray. Then he put them back. “I guess I should be nice to you for a while, huh?” He left.

After supper, Bonnie and two of her girlfriends came in. “So where’s the kid?” asked Bonnie as she plopped down on the bed.

“Ow!” yelled Susan, and Bonnie jumped up.

“What’s wrong?”

“If you have to sit here, at least do it more gently and don’t sit on me.”

“Oh, sorry. I’ll be careful”.

The three girls stayed for half an hour, by the end of which Susan felt like screaming at them to go. They talked about school and other kids and how silly Pete had looked passing out cigars and how proud he seemed to be that he’d gotten his girl in trouble and how some of the kids had asked Bonnie how “poor Susan” was doing.

And then they had to see the baby, so Susan sent them to get him and then wished she hadn’t because they didn’t seem to know the first thing about how to hold a small baby, and she was terrified they were going to drop him.

At last they were gone and Susan was alone with her child. As she held him, she studied the small face. It seemed to her his head was shaped the same as Pete’s, but his nose and mouth were hers. His eyes were blue, but she knew they might darken.

How amazing that this tiny life belonged to her! And how frightening. He depended completely on her. What was it the Children’s Aid lady had said? She had wanted Susan to give the baby up for adoption because so many of the children who were abused belonged to unwed teenage mothers. But Susan couldn’t understand that. She would look after her own baby. She would never hurt him. How could anyone hurt something as sweet as this?



Pete came in. “Oh, they let you have him, huh?”

“Do you want to hold him? You can if you put on that gown.”

“Me hold him? You gotta be kidding.” He sat down. “You look like you’re doing just fine.”

“Chicken.”

“Put the kid down and say that.”

Susan smiled. “Look how tiny he is? Can you believe you were once that small?”

“I wasn’t. This little runt is only seven pounds. My mom says I was nine. Speaking of my mom, has she been here?”

“No. Is she coming?”

“If she doesn’t, I may never speak to her again.”

Susan didn’t say anything. She knew Pete’s parents were still opposed to Susan’s keeping the baby. Only with great reluctance had they agreed that Pete and Susan could get married at the end of the school year.

“Don’t worry about it,” she said. “If they miss seeing their new-born grandchild, it’ll be their loss.”

There was a knock at the door and Susan’s mother came in. “Oh, hello Pete. Well, how do you like him?”

“He won’t hold him,” said Susan.

“Well, I will if you’ll let me.”

Susan pointed to the gown for her mother to put on and then said, “Do you want to hold him for a minute first, Pete? I’ll help you.”

“Come on, Pete, you have to learn some time.”

“Oh, all right.” The gown on, he hesitantly received the baby from Susan. He held him stiffly for a few minutes and then said it was her mom’s turn. A few minutes later, he left.

“I hope Pete didn’t leave because I came.”

“No,” Susan lied, “he had homework to do.”

“Speaking of that, do you still feel you’ll be ready to go back to school next week?”

“I think so.”

“It’s going to seem funny having a baby around the house again.” Her mom seemed at ease holding the sleeping baby. “Oh, and be sure to tell Pete he can come over to see the baby whenever he wants. Or help bathe it or whatever. After all, it’s his baby too.”

After a few more minutes, her mom left for more shopping before the stores closed. “I had to wait to see if it was a boy or girl before I bought a few things—pink or blue, you know. Sleep well. Your dad had work to do tonight.”

She had been gone only a few minutes before Pete came back. Susan looked up. “Mom said she hoped you hadn’t gone because she came.”

Pete laughed. “I bet. She saw me in the hall and had the nerve to come over and tell me I can come to your house to see the baby any time I want. As if I need her permission to see my own kid! Maybe I’ll never come over. That’d show her.”

In a soft voice, Susan said, “It would show me, too.”

“You’ve got nothing to complain about. I’m going to marry you, ain’t I?”

“Aren’t.”

“What?”

“You said ‘ain’t.’”

“Sorry. I’m not the English genius. That’s you.”

“It doesn’t matter. You’re hungry, aren’t you?”

“What?”

“The baby. I was feeding him. If you’re this hungry all the time, you’ll soon be as big as your daddy.”

“More like as fat as your grandpa.”

“My dad isn’t fat.”

“Oh, sure. And I suppose you want me to believe he and your mom get along, too.”

She had no answer to this, so she changed the subject.

“What are we going to name him?”

“I don’t know. Just so long as you don’t get any crazy idea about naming it after your dad or anything.”

“We could name him after you.”

“Thanks, but no thanks.”

“How about Cory?”

“If you want.”

“I’ll see what mom thinks.”

“Why? It’s your kid. Name it what you want. If you like Cory, then that’s what it is. Okay?”

“I guess.”

“How long do you have to stay here?”

“I’m not sure. Not too long.”

“Good. It’s depressing here. The smell bugs me.” He stood up. “Ed’s getting some beer, so me and some of the guys are going to celebrate.”

“Pete, you shouldn’t.”

“You worry too much. See you tomorrow.”

Susan sat there for some time just holding her baby and thinking about the future.

She was startled when her dad walked in.

“I didn’t expect to find you alone,” he commented as he gave her a quick kiss on the cheek, set a box of chocolates on the night table, and sat in the chair. “Feeling okay?”

“Pretty good. Probably the younger you are, the easier it is.”

“Yeah. I guess your mom wasn’t that much older when you and Bonnie were born.”

“Is that why you got married?”

He looked disconcerted. “Well, er.... Your mom was nineteen and I was twenty-one. That’s a lot different than you and Pete.” He stood up. “Well, I’ve got a lot of work in my briefcase, so I guess I’d better go and let you sleep. Just wanted to bring you some chocolates. Bye, Sweetie-pie.”

After a few minutes, a nurse came in to take the baby back to the nursery and Susan fell asleep.

She spent the next morning in classes for new mothers, where she learned about feeding and bathing babies. It looked easy. But at noon, when Cory started spitting up and crying, she felt unsure for the first time since his birth. However, a nurse showed her how to burp him, and after that he was fine.

During lunch, her mom came in loaded with packages. “Some things to bring him home in. By the way, I think Robert would be a nice name. Or Christopher.”

“We’ve decided on Cory.”

“Cory? But, don’t you think...? Well, I guess Cory’s okay.”

“And we’ll register him under Pete’s name.”

“I’d have your father check that. There might be some legal implications. Don’t do it yet.”

An hour after her mother left, Pete appeared.

“Shouldn’t you be at class?” she asked.

“Aw, I skipped out. Old man Watson drives me crazy.”

She didn’t comment.

“What’s this stuff?”

“Mom bought clothes for taking Cory home.”

He paced around the room, “She’s so bossy! You know what’s going to happen, don’t you? He’s going to be her kid, not yours. She’s going to be home with him all day, and when you get home she’ll say, ‘Don’t bother him. He just went to sleep,’ and she’ll tell you when you can touch him or even look at him, and if we want to take him out with us she’ll have some reason why we can’t. It’ll be like he’s her kid.” He paced the room. “I’ve had it to here with all of them! My folks only asked once how you were and that’s it! And your stupid sister makes me sick! Her and her snooty friends. She could care less how I feel. Man, I wish somebody’d get her pregnant! Then she wouldn’t act so high and mighty. And your so-called-friends. ‘How’s Susan?’ in those syrupy little voices. I felt like throwing up. I don’t think anybody cares how I feel!”

“I do,” Susan said quietly.

He spun around and sat beside her on the bed. She put her arms tightly around him as he kissed her hungrily. After a while she said, “We’ll get through the next months somehow and then we’ll be married and everything will be okay.”

He drew back. “Oh, sure. All I have to do then is work and go to night school at the same time. *If* I can get a job. And you’ll have to work, too. And we’ll have to drag the kid everywhere we go.”

Susan straightened up. “It wasn’t my idea to get pregnant.”

“Well, it sure wasn’t mine.”

Tears started and she looked down.

Pete raised her chin. “All right, let’s not start on that again.” He got up and walked around the room. “I guess it’s just that now the kid’s really here, it all seems more...I don’t know...real, I guess. Like there’s no escape.”

“You don’t have to marry me.”

“It ain’t...isn’t...that. It’s just...Oh, forget it, okay?” He came over and kissed her again.

“Do you have homework?”

“Nothing much. You can do it for me if you like. I’m going to Craig’s to work on his car.”

Bonnie and a few of Susan’s friends noisily entered the room. After grimacing at Susan, Pete left, and Susan tried to look interested as they chatted about boys and clothes and their favourite videos. She was glad when they left.

But while she felt different from her friends, she didn’t fit in with the other new mothers, either. She remembered a story she’d read about a man without a country. In a way, she was like him. Maybe when she got back in school... She thought about Pete’s frustration. Would he really be able to help her?

A nurse brought Cory and Susan held the tiny body close. He was so warm and cozy. And so helpless. She glanced up at the picture of the Madonna with her Child. Her parents had sent her to a church kids’ club for a year or so when she was about ten, so she

knew the gist of the story. How God sent his son to be born in a stable. She wondered how Mary had felt that night. Had she worried about the future? Had she been afraid? Or had she trusted God to look after her child?

Susan lifted Cory and patted his back gently, the way the nurse had shown her. Tears filled her eyes as she wondered what the future held for the little life she had brought into the world. And why, with so many people around her, did she feel so alone?

“Oh God,” she whispered, “I don’t know if you’re real or not. I don’t know who to trust.” Tears dropped onto Cory’s blanket. “God, if you’re really here, would you help me, please? And help Cory. He’s so small, and I want him to know what it means to be loved, and to be safe.”

A verse came into her mind. She had won a prize for learning it at the church camp. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that whoever believed in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” She remembered giving her heart to God. But when she went home and told her parents, they had laughed. And Bonnie had told her only stupid people believed in God. So she’d locked that episode away. Until now.

What if they were wrong? What if God was real?

And what did she have to lose?

She looked pensively at her son’s sleeping face. “It’ll be okay, Cory,” she said. “I’ll take good care of you. Promise. Tomorrow, I’ll talk to the Children’s Aid lady and ask her to make sure she finds a really good family to adopt you. I’m going to miss you so much, but I know it’s the right think to do. Maybe someday God will help me see you again. And I’ll pray for you every single day, Cory. That’s the best thing I can do for you now.”

