

Having Hope at Home by David S. Craig

Synopsis

Carolyn is having a baby, her first baby, and because she is Carolyn, she is passionate about having a home birth, which is to say, in the beloved but run down farm house of her grandfather Russel, with her gorgeous Quebecois husband Michel and her supportive midwife, Dawn. It's all she needs. No hospital. No meddling nurses. No C-sections.

But she also wants her baby to have grandparents and that means reconciling with her parents, Jane and Bill, with whom she is estranged. To achieve a rapprochement, she has invited them to a high level peace summit in the form of a formal, sit-down dinner with a carved turkey, her grandmother's china, sterling silver cutlery, homemade condiments and cloth napkins. This is, she knows, the kind of gesture her parents will understand and appreciate. It is also a dinner she has never served before.

But it is a dinner she feels must go perfectly. The drinks before, the movement to the table, the dinner appearing effortlessly, the food (especially the turkey) being cooked perfectly, the smooth transition to desert and coffee, then to the living room and then to the door. So when Carolyn experiences her first contraction five minutes before her parents arrive she experiences a very high level of anxiety. Because Bill, besides being her judgmental father (see above re: estrangement), is also the head of obstetrics at the local hospital. If Bill finds out that Carolyn is having a home birth he will be deeply, deeply hurt (understandable) and completely self-righteous (unendurable).

So the first act is all about Carolyn, against Michel's and then Dawn's better judgment, hiding the fact that she is in labour while she serves a full course, sit down dinner. This situation is exploited to maximum comic effect until, at act end, the truth comes out, the midwife is exposed and the resulting argument is so ferocious that Carolyn's labor actually stops. The baby, Carolyn intuits fiercely, doesn't want to be born.

In Act Two, we watch this family move slowly to a different place. While they all cling to their beliefs, most particularly Carolyn, they are all somewhat humiliated by their inability to have a pleasant dinner together. In Bill and Jane, they are forced to, finally, give up trying to influence their daughter and look to their future. In Russell, it forces an admission of admiration for Bill. Meanwhile, Carolyn and Michel, hiding in the downstairs bedroom, decide to get married and do so (in her grandmother's wedding dress) thus driving Jane to despair. Russell, imitating the Eskimos he admires, decides to rid his family of a useless burden and walks out into the snow to die just as the baby is born. Bill follows and effects a rescue. But the climax is the scene between Carolyn and her father. They are both proud, stubborn people of integrity. We watch as they unpack their relationship leading back to the day that Bill brought his five year old daughter to see the birthing mothers in the hospital. The scene terrified the young girl and deeply embarrassed the father creating a small but growing wedge in their relationship that has lasted until this moment. The catharsis Carolyn experiences from this realization causes her labour to begin again and the play rushes on to curtain.

Is there a happy ending? Most certainly. But we are not fooled. We know this family has achieved a moment of happiness that has been hard won and, as we all know, temporary. It makes the final tableau sweeter still.