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Having Hope at Home

By
David S. Craig



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“*Having Hope at Home* was commissioned and produced by
the Blyth Festival, Blyth, Ontario.”

Having Hope at Home premiered at the Blyth Festival, Blyth, Ontario, on Aug. 7, 2003.

Cast:

Carolyn..... Mary Krohnert
Russell..... Jerry Franken
Michel Shawn Mathieson
Jane Michelle Fisk
Bill..... Ross Manson
Dawn Caroline Gillis

Production Staff:

Director Eric Coates
Set and Costume Design Andjelija Djuric
Lighting Design Renée Brode
Stage Manager Kate Macdonnel
Assistant Stage Manager..... Sarah Dalgleish

Having Hope at Home

CHARACTERS

CAROLYN (CARO) BINGHAM

RUSSELL (GRAMPS) BINGHAM: Carolyn's grandfather

MICHEL (MISH) CHARBONNEAU: Carolyn's husband

WILLIAM (BILL) BINGHAM: Carolyn's father

JANE BINGHAM: Carolyn's mother

DAWN SHAW: Carolyn's midwife

TIME

ACT I: The present

ACT II: A few minutes later

SETTING

The layout of the kitchen is as follows: UR, moving L, is the back door (which leads to the mudroom and the yard), the telephone (wired—they don't have cellphones), the fridge, a kitchen counter (including a sink facing windows), the oven and the door into the rest of the house. From RC, moving L, is the wood stove, a dining room table that, as the curtain opens, is set for dinner (a dinner that, should a concerned stage manager be reading these lines, is served but never eaten) and the door leading to Carolyn and Michel's main floor bedroom. DR, moving L, is the door to the bathroom, Russell's chair, a sofa (with a cedar chest in front acting as a coffee table)

and the trapdoor that opens to stairs leading down into the basement (where a trap is not feasible, a vertical door can be used). On the R apron is Russell's woodpile.

PLACE

The action takes place anywhere that has winter, turkey dinners, farms and families. It is a cold, stormy, winter night. We are in the kitchen of Russell Bingham's old farmhouse. This is its last winter. The foundation of "the new house" (across the road) has been poured, construction will begin in the spring, and they (Russell, Carolyn, Michel and the new baby) will move in after Thanksgiving if they can afford it. But all that is in the future. For the moment, they are in the old, drafty, unrenovated house. In fact, the old farmhouse is so poorly insulated they have stopped heating unused rooms, which include the living room and most of the second floor.

Their living space consists of a large farm kitchen. Insulation has been stuffed into cracks and holes. Wallpaper is peeling. Kitchen cabinets are broken or eccentrically repaired. And yet, there are clear signs of imagination and care. There are flowers, stencils, some lovely old pine pieces (stripped and restored), photos of ancestors, books and paintings that indicate care, not decay. To the critical eye, it looks like a ruin, but to the forgiving eye, it speaks of home.

NOTE

An '/' in the text indicates that the character is listening to someone speak on the telephone.

Like rests in music, certain breaks in the dialogue are indicated. A silence is longer than a pause which is longer than a beat. A beat is the length of an intake of breath.

Having Hope at Home

ACT I

SCENE 1—Before

(Music builds to a climax and stops. We hear a woman experiencing the first serious contraction of her labor.)

Lights up.

A hand appears from behind the sofa. Another hand. CAROLYN's head appears.)

CAROLYN. Oh. My. Gosh. *(She stands. She is nine months pregnant, and she has been washing the floor. Calling.)* Mish ... ? Gramps ... ? *(She goes to the telephone and dials.)* Ohmigosh, ohmigosh, ohmigosh. // Dawn it's me. Something's happening. I've been having little twinges all day but just now I had the mother of all cramps. It was like an alien was inside my body, ripping open the floor of my uterus. How do I stop it? // Yes honey, I would like to speak to your mummy. // Can you put the movie on pause? // Thank you. *(To herself.)* Please, baby, not now, not now. *(Calling.)* Mish! *(Into the receiver.)* Dawn? Ohmigosh, I just gave all my symptoms to your six-year-old. Tell her I was describing a movie. A horror movie. It may not be too far from the truth. // Nothing's wrong. Absolutely nothing. But something just happened. I think I had my first contraction. // No, it's not wonderful. My parents are coming for dinner.

(RUSSELL comes scurrying in the back door.)

CAROLYN (*cont'd*). Grampa, where have you been?

RUSSELL. Well ...

CAROLYN. You're supposed to be helping me get ready.

RUSSELL. Oh ... ?

CAROLYN. Have you fixed the toilet?

RUSSELL. Uh ...

CAROLYN. Have you brought in the firewood?

RUSSELL (*remembering he hasn't*). Oh yes ...

CAROLYN. They're going to be here any minute.

RUSSELL. Right you are.

(RUSSELL exits outside. CAROLYN moves to the sofa.)

CAROLYN. Listen, I gotta go. I just wanted to share the happy news so ... // (*Urgent.*) No, you can't come over. // My parents don't know about you. // I can't cancel. That's what they expect me to do. That's why I'm having this dinner, to prove I can do something without cancelling; besides they're already on the way and my mother made a point of saying that my father "wasn't bringing his pager." My father doesn't have a shower without his pager so it's a really big deal. // To you it's "just a dinner." To me it's a high-level peace summit between two warring nations. // I'm not exaggerating. Months of delicate negotiations have led to this visit, because tonight, for the first time in my life, I am going to do something stunningly symbolic. I am going to serve a full course formal dinner to my parents. Dinner in my house, under my roof, by my rules and they will suddenly see that I am a fully adult human being, capable of making fully adult decisions. And when the clouds part and they see the shining adulthood of my being they will sue for peace, get off my back and become the gentle, doting,

nonjudgemental grandparents I want them to be. That's why I can't cancel the dinner. That and the small fact that my father is head of obstetrics at City Hospital. If he arrives and finds me having a home birth, with a midwife, he'll never talk to me again. // Why do you need that? I'm not in labor. // But ... // OK, OK, but make it quick. I have to peel the carrots. *(She finds a stethoscope and holds it to her belly.)* Hold on. I just gotta find the little dickens ... Oh! There he is! *(Speaking into the earpiece of the stethoscope.)* Honey? This is your mother. Don't be in a rush, OK? Wait till tomorrow. Love you. *(Into the telephone.)* All right let's go. One, two, three ... *(Continues counting.)*

(RUSSELL enters. He's in a panic. He opens the trapdoor to the basement and disappears.)

MICHEL *(off)*. Russell!!!

(MICHEL enters. He is a gorgeous, raven haired man, slightly shorter than CAROLYN but perfectly proportioned. He is furious. He speaks with a French Canadian accent.)

MICHEL. Where is he?

CAROLYN *(to MICHEL)*. Boots! *(To DAWN.)* Ten, eleven, twelve ... *(She continues.)*

MICHEL *(looking down into the basement)*. Is he down there? Are you down there? I hope so, because I'm going to pass down there and break every bone in your body.

CAROLYN. Mish! Get changed. Nineteen, twenty ...

MICHEL. Russell was in the barn.

CAROLYN. Who cares? My parents are coming. Twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five ...

MICHEL. He was in the milk room.

CAROLYN. Did he pump the milk down the drain?

MICHEL. No.

CAROLYN. Did he pump the milk back into the cows?

MICHEL. He took the milker apart. It's in pieces all over the floor.

CAROLYN. Then put a bigger lock on the door. There's something more important happening. *(To DAWN.)* Thirty-seven, thirty-eight, thirty-nine ...

MICHEL. Who are you talking to?

CAROLYN *(to MICHEL)*. Dawn. *(To DAWN.)* Is that enough?

MICHEL. Is the baby coming?

CAROLYN *(listening to DAWN)*. Yes.

MICHEL. Really?

CAROLYN *(listening to DAWN)*. Yes.

MICHEL *(sinking to his knees in rapture)*. The baby is coming!

CAROLYN *(to MICHEL)*. What? No. The baby is not coming.

My parents are coming. And you promised to help. So please shave your face, put on a clean shirt—NOT the cowboy shirt—and for one night don't worry about cows or the barn, OK?

MICHEL. OK.

CAROLYN. Now go.

MICHEL. OK.

CAROLYN. And find Grampa.

MICHEL. That's just what I was going to do.

CAROLYN *(to DAWN)*. Sorry. Yes, that was Michel. // Yeah, he's pretty excited. So what was the baby's pulse? // Well, there you go. We've got lots of time.

(MICHEL goes down the stairs to the basement. RUSSELL emerges from the basement, shuts the door and stands on it.)

CAROLYN *(cont'd)*. Grampa?

RUSSELL. Yeah.

CAROLYN. Where'd Michel go?

RUSSELL. I think he's in the barn.

MICHEL (*off—tries to open the door*). Hey!

RUSSELL. Well look at that, he's in the basement.

MICHEL (*off—pounding*). Get off!

RUSSELL. You know, Carolyn, there's just no respect for the elderly these days, no reverence for the wisdom of years.

MICHEL (*off*). Get off the door right now!!!!

CAROLYN. Grampa ... I think he wants to come out.

(The trapdoor begins to shake.)

RUSSELL. I'll let him out. You hide the shotgun.

(RUSSELL steps away from the door and heads for the porch. MICHEL follows right behind him. RUSSELL cuts downstage and across in front of the sofa.)

MICHEL. Come back here ...

RUSSELL. I didn't do anything ...

CAROLYN. Michel ...

MICHEL. I told you.

RUSSELL. Stay back!

MICHEL. Don't go ...

RUSSELL. He's going to kill me.

MICHEL. Into the milk room!

RUSSELL. Help!

CAROLYN. Michel!

(The game stops. CAROLYN is between them.)

CAROLYN (*cont'd*). Do I have to deal with this right now?

MICHEL. I told him. Don't touch. Does he listen? No. He's deaf in the head.

RUSSELL. I was helping out.

CAROLYN. He was helping out.

RUSSELL. 'Cause it's my farm.

MICHEL. And it's my equipment and I don't want him touching it.

CAROLYN. Why not?

MICHEL. He's not a qualified dairy equipment technician.

RUSSELL. Hah! He thinks I'm useless. The Frenchman's calling me useless.

MICHEL. You're not useless. You're just useless to me.

CAROLYN. He doesn't mean that, Grampa.

RUSSELL. Yes he does. I've got a bad heart and rheumy hands and he thinks I'm useless when I can do more work than all the frogs in China.

MICHEL. You mean do more damage.

(CAROLYN begins to slowly double over with a contraction.)

RUSSELL. Don't talk to me, froggy. They don't let fruits and vegetables across that border. How did you get through? You just take your froggy legs and jump back across the border where you belong.

CAROLYN. Stop.

MICHEL. Maybe I will, you maudit Yankee racist cow dog. You would freeze to death without me. You can't even light a match without me.

CAROLYN. Stoooooooooop!

MICHEL. Caro?

CAROLYN. Oh don't worry about me. I'm just the pregnant mother of your unborn child. What am I compared to your beloved cows?

MICHEL. What's wrong?

RUSSELL (*to MICHEL*). Baby.

MICHEL. Are you in labor?

RUSSELL. She is. When they get mouthy like that, you know.

CAROLYN. Do you want to live another second?! (*Gasps and speaks casually into the telephone.*) Dawn? // Hi! // No, everything's fine. I'm just having a little chat with the men in my family. I'll give you a call in the morning. (*To MICHEL.*) Hang up the phone.

(*MICHEL hesitates.*)

CAROLYN (*cont'd*). Mish.

MICHEL. Are you in labor?

CAROLYN. No. If I was in labor, I'd be talking to your mother.

MICHEL. But you just had a contraction.

CAROLYN. That was gas.

MICHEL. No it wasn't.

CAROLYN. How would you know?

MICHEL. Because if it was gas, you wouldn't be talking to the midwife.

CAROLYN. OK, I had, what might be loosely described as a contraction. The first contraction of my first labor. A labor that could last for hours, days. My parents are arriving any minute!

RUSSELL. And if there's an emergency, I can handle it. I've played midwife to hundreds of cows. You just reach in, grab the front hoof and pull them out. You should see the look of gratitude on the cow's face. Course it's slippery work. I've been known to drop some of them on their heads.

MICHEL (*taking the telephone*). Dawn? It's Michel. How soon can you get here?

CAROLYN. NOOOOOOOOOOO!

RUSSELL. Now, sweetie ...

CAROLYN. Don't you sweetie me.

RUSSELL. Yes, ma'am.

MICHEL. OK. See you soon. (*Hangs up.*) She's on her way.

CAROLYN. Why are you guys ignoring what I want? I'm not worried about having a baby. I could have a baby in a barn, in a field, on a roller coaster. What I can't do, without your help, is have a pleasant dinner with my parents.

MICHEL. Carolyn.

CAROLYN. What?

MICHEL. Come here.

CAROLYN. Why?

MICHEL. OK, I'm coming over there.

(MICHEL joyfully dances towards CAROLYN.)

CAROLYN. Mish? Mish what are you doing?

MICHEL. The baby is coming. (*He falls to his knees and kisses CAROLYN's belly.*)

RUSSELL. There he goes being emotional.

CAROLYN (*loving it*). Mish ... Mish stop. Stop. Stop!

MICHEL. Is there anything I can do?

CAROLYN. Anything you can ... What is it about the male personality that allows you both to stand in the middle of a million things to do and say with total innocence, "Is there anything I can do?!"

MICHEL. I'll make you a cup of tea.

CAROLYN. No! Ohmigod. I'm going to cry. You guys are totally ignoring what I want. My parents, your in-laws, your son and daughter-in-law are coming to dinner. I've asked you to fix the toilet. I've asked you to put on a clean shirt. I've asked you to help me the way I help you every day of the year. No. Not every day, every damn day. Every double damn, double day, double double damn ... (*Weeps.*) What's happening?

RUSSELL. Hormones.

CAROLYN. You had to say that, didn't you?

RUSSELL. I knew you'd want to know.

MICHEL (*tentatively*). What do you want done first?

CAROLYN (*taking a deep breath*). Cut the carrots.

RUSSELL. You stay with her. I'll cut the carrots.

CAROLYN. You can't hold a knife.

RUSSELL. I can manage.

CAROLYN. You can barely hold a fork.

RUSSELL. Do you think I'm useless too?

CAROLYN. If you could cut the carrots it would be a big help.

(CAROLYN and MICHEL move into bedroom. CAROLYN tries to find her makeup. MICHEL tries to find a clean shirt.)

MICHEL. What are you doing?

CAROLYN. Putting on lipstick.

MICHEL. Why?

CAROLYN. For my mother, who else. She doesn't go to the grocery store without lipstick. She considers going out without makeup a form of nudity.

MICHEL. So tonight you will "make up" with your mother.

CAROLYN. Yes. She'll arrive with a present, something expensive. Something in a Barmakian box. Something in a Barmakian box that was actually bought at Barmakian's. She thinks that's what I need. I actually need a new carburetor for the roto-tiller but she'll bring a Royal Doulton figurine.

MICHEL. At least she tries.

CAROLYN. Yes. Unlike my father. Last night, I was so nervous about this dinner that I had a nightmare. I dreamt I'd given birth to a beautiful baby boy. There I was, alone with the baby, and then with you, and then with a crowd of people cheering and waving flags, and then suddenly I was alone, strapped to a chair, with my father standing over me saying, "Put the baby back, Carolyn, you've done it wrong." And I said, "I can't put it back. It's breathing," and he said, "Do what I say. I'm a doctor."

MICHEL. It's just a dream.

CAROLYN. Or an omen.

MICHEL. We're not doing open heart surgery. We're having a baby, with a midwife, after months of careful thought and preparation.

CAROLYN. And it's going to be great, right?

MICHEL. It's going to be perfect.

(RUSSELL has been struggling to hold a carrot and the knife. At this point, they drop to the ground.)

CAROLYN. Grampa?

RUSSELL. Yeah.

CAROLYN. You OK?

RUSSELL. Oh yeah.

CAROLYN. I think he's nervous too.