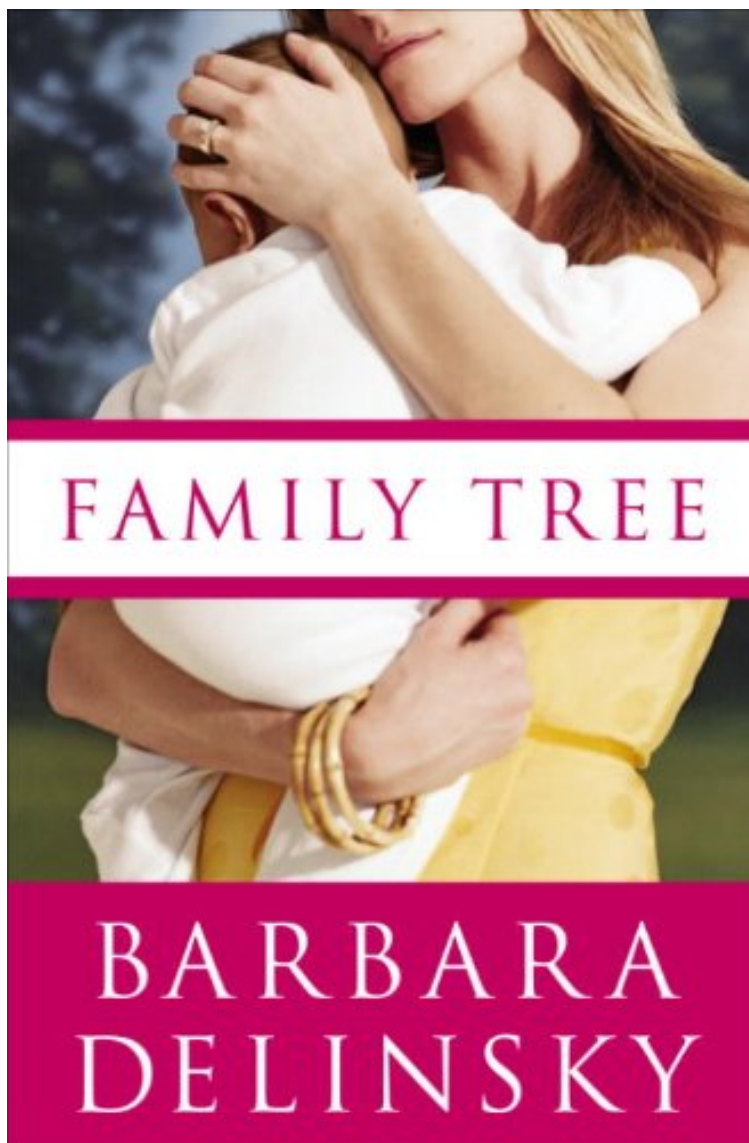


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Family Tree



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurFor as long as she can remember, Dana Clarke has longed for the stability of home and family. Now she has married a man she adores, whose heritage can be traced back to the Mayflower, and she is about to give birth to their first child. But what should be the happiest day of her life becomes the day her world falls apart. Her daughter is born beautiful and healthy, and in addition, unmistakably African-American in appearance. Danas determination to discover the truth about her babys heritage becomes a shocking, poignant journey. A superbly crafted novel, Family Tree asks penetrating questions about family and the choices people make in times of crisis.From the Trade Paperback edition.ExtraitChapter 1 Something woke her midream. She didn't know whether it was the baby kicking, a gust of sea air tumbling in over the sill, surf breaking on the rocks, or even her mother's voice, liquid in the waves, but as she lay

there openeyed in bed in the dark, the dream remained vivid. It was an old dream, and no less embarrassing to her for knowing the script. She was out in public, for all the world to see, lacking a vital piece of clothing.

In this instance, it was her blouse. She had left home without it and now stood on the steps of her high schoolher high schoolwearing only a bra, and an old one at that. It didnt matter that she was sixteen years past graduation and knew none of the people on the steps. She was exposed and thoroughly mortified. And thenthis was a firstthere was her motherinlaw, standing off to the side, wearing a look of dismay and carryingbizarrethe blouse.Dana might have laughed at the absurdity of it, if, at that very moment, something else hadnt diverted her thoughts. It was the sudden rush of fluid between her legs, like nothing she had ever felt before.Afraid to move, she whispered her husbands name. When he didnt reply, she reached out, shook his arm, and said in full voice, Hugh?He managed a gutlow Mm?We have to get up.She felt him turn and stretch.My water just broke.He sat up with a start. Leaning over her, his deep voice higher than normal, he asked, Are you sure?It keeps coming. But Im not due for two weeks.That's okay, he reassured her, thats okay. The baby is sevenplus poundsright in the middle of the fullterm range. What time is it?Oneten.Dont move. Ill get towels. He rolled away and off the bed.She obeyed him, partly because Hugh had studied every aspect of childbirth and knew what to do, and partly to avoid spreading the mess. As soon as he returned, though, she supported her belly and pushed herself up. Squinting against the sudden light of the lamp, she took one of the towels, slipped it between her legs, and shuffled into the bathroom.Hugh appeared seconds later, wideeyed and pale in the vanity lights. What do you see? he asked.No blood. But its definitely the baby and not me.Do you feel anything?Like terror? She was dead serious. As prepared as they werethey had read dozens of books, talked with innumerable friends, grilled the doctor and her partners and her nursepractitioner and the hospital personnel during a preadmission tourthe reality of the moment was something else. With childbirth suddenly and irrevocably imminent, Dana was scared.Like contractions, Hugh replied dryly.No. Just a funny feeling. Maybe a vague tightening.What does vague mean?Subtle.Is it a contraction?I don't know.Does it come and go?I dont know, Hugh. Really. I just woke up and then there was a gush She broke off, feeling something. A cramp. She held her breath, let it out, met his eyes. Very mild.Cramp or contraction?Contraction, she decided, starting to tremble. They had waited so long for this. They were as ready as they would ever be.Are you okay while I call the doctor? he asked.She nodded, knowing that if she hadnt he would have brought the phone into the bathroom. But she wasnt helpless. As doting as Hugh had been lately, she was an independent sort, and by design. She knew what it was to be wholly dependent on someone and then have her taken away. It didnt get much worse.So, while he phoned the doctor, she fit her big belly into her newest, largest warmup suit, now lined with a pad from her post-delivery stash to catch amniotic fluid that continued to leak, and went down the hall to the babys room. She had barely turned on the light when he called.Dee?In here!Buttoning jeans, he appeared at the door. His dark hair was mussed, his eyes concerned. "If those pains are less than ten minutes apart, were supposed to head to the hospital. Are you okay?She nodded. Just want a last look.Its perfect, honey, he said as he stretched into an old navy tee shirt. All set?I don't think theyre less than ten minutes apart.They will be by the time were halfway there.This is our first, she argued. First babies take longer.That may be the norm, but every norm has exceptions. Indulge me on this, please?Taking his hand, she kissed his palm and pressed it to her neck. She needed another minute.She felt safe here, sheltered, happy. Of all the nurseries she had decorated for clients, this was her bestfour walls of a panoramic meadow, laced with flowers, tall grasses, suntipped trees. Everything was white, soft orange, and green, myriad shades of each highlighted with a splotch of blue in a flower or the sky. The feeling was one of a perfect world, gentle, harmonious, and safe.Selfsufficient she might be, but she had dreamed of a world like this from the moment she had dared to dream again.Hugh had grown up in a world like this. His childhood had been sheltered, his adolescence rich. His family had come to America on the Mayflower and been prominent players ever since. Four centuries of success had bred stability. Hugh might downplay the connection, but he was a direct beneficiary of it.Your parents expected pastel balloons on the wall, she remarked, releasing his hand. Im afraid I've disappointed them.Not you, he answered, we, but its a moot point. This isnt my parents baby. He made for the door. I need shoes.Moving aside knitting needles that held the top half of a moss green sleepsack, Dana carefully lowered herself into the Boston rocker. She had dragged it down from the attic, where Hugh hid most of his heirloom pieces, and while she had rescued others, now dispersed through the house, this was her favorite. Purchased in the 1840s by his greatgreatgrandfather, the eventual Civil War General, it had a spindle back and threesection rolled seat that was strikingly comfortable for something so old. Months ago, even before they had put the meadow on the walls, Dana had sanded the rockers chipped paint and restored it to gleaming perfection. And Hugh

had let her. He knew that she valued family history all the more for having lived without it. That said, everything else was new, a family history that began here. The crib and its matching dresser were imported, but the rest, from the changing pad on top, to the handpainted fabric framing the windows, to the mural, were custom done by her roster of artists. That roster, which included topnotch painters, carpenters, carpet and window people, also included her grandmother and herself. There was a throw over one end of the crib, made by her grandmother and mirroring the meadow mural; a cashmere rabbit that Dana had knitted in every shade of orange; a bunting, two sweaters, numerous hats, and a stack of carriage blankets and that didn't count the winter wool bunting in progress, which was mounded in a wicker basket at the foot of her chair, or the sleepsack she held in her hand. They had definitely gone overboard. Rocking slowly, she smiled as she remembered what had been here eight months before. Her pregnancy had just been confirmed, when she had come home from work to find the room blanketed with tulips. Purple, yellow, white all were fresh enough to last for days. Hugh had planned this surprise with sheer pleasure, and Dana believed it had set the tone. There was magic in this room. There was warmth and love. There was security. Their baby would be happy here, she knew it would. Opening a hand on her stomach, she caressed the mound that was absurdly large in proportion to the rest of her. She couldn't feel the baby move; the poor little thing didn't have room to do much more than wiggle a finger or toe, but Dana felt the tightening of muscles that would push her child into the world. Breathe slowly. Hugh's soothing baritone came back from their Lamaze classes. She was still breathing deeply well after the end of what was definitely another contraction when the slap of flipflops announced his return. She grinned. I'm picturing the baby in this room. But he was observant to a fault. That was another contraction, wasn't it? Are you timing them? Not yet. They're too far apart. I'm trying to distract myself by thinking happy thoughts. Remember the first time I saw your house? It was the right question. Smiling, he leaned against the doorjamb. Sure do. You were wearing neon green. It wasn't neon, it was lime, and you didn't know what the piece was. I knew what it was. I just didn't know what it was called. It was called a sweater. His eyes held hers. Laugh if you want; you do every time—but that sweater was more angular and asymmetrical than anything I'd ever seen.