

# A Man's Home...

A family drama

by Donna Hopkins

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## CHARACTERS

FRANK BARKOWSKI- a recently retired machinist with a Mike Ditka mustache, wears a plaid flannel shirt  
FRANKIE (FRANCINE)- his not quite middle-aged redheaded daughter, a graphic artist in San Francisco  
CLAUDETTE- Frankie's partner, short-cropped hair  
MIRIAM- Frank's wife, a small woman  
HECTOR RODRIGUEZ- Frank's neighbor, nearly Frank's age  
WALTER- Frank's one-time neighbor and longtime friend  
WANDA - a real estate agent in oversized glasses and a gold blazer with a tower logo on it

## THE SET

A 1940s bungalow on the south side of Chicago with a For Sale sign visible

### Left side

Frank's workshop in the garage  
shiny tools hung in orderly rows  
on a blindingly bright, white-washed pegboard,  
an immaculate, spotless floor

In one corner a large object covered in bubble-wrap  
and a boxed computer.  
On the workbench a red vise.

### Right side

An unintentionally retro kitchen, with a wooden  
kitchen table and four chairs, a coffeepot

A screen door leads to the garden out back

### Far right

Frank and Miriam's bedroom, their bed

Props Miriam's gardening gloves, very feminine,  
purple floral with tapered fingers

SCENE I

*It's late summer, in the afternoon. In the garage/workshop.*

FRANKIE. *(Entering with Claudette)* MOM...DAD...  
They must be out back.

CLAUDETTE. Are you sure you're ready for this?

FRANKIE. *I am* – I'm not so sure about my parents...

CLAUDETTE. Oh, don't worry. They'll *love* me. *(Looking around)* I've never *seen* so many tools.

FRANKIE. Dad says real men *don't* use duct tape.

CLAUDETTE. You could *eat* off this floor. It's cleaner than our kitchen.

FRANKIE. It's always reminded me of an operating room. It was always strictly off-limits. Even today I feel guilty being here.

CLAUDETTE. I know what that is – an anvil – like in the Roadrunner cartoons.

FRANKIE. No. Actually it's a vise. Always reminds me of a heart.  
*(Demonstrating)* You use it to hold things – tight.

CLAUDETTE. This where you built the birdhouse?

FRANKIE. *(Nods)*

CLAUDETTE. That's a really nice birdhouse. You should've kept up with the woodworking. They let girls take shop at your high school – right?

FRANKIE. Yeah, right. Dad would've loved *that*. The only guy at the plant whose "princess" played with power tools *(Pause)* I took home ec instead.

CLAUDETTE. Oh, *that* really took! *(They giggle.)*

FRANKIE. C'mon. I want to show you Mom's garden. *(Exit)*

*In the kitchen.*

FRANK *enters with a small stack of mail in his hands. Mexican music is heard offstage.*

FRANK. Playing their damn music again.

MIRIAM. I like it. Sounds like a polka. It reminds me of a wedding.

FRANK. *You like everything. And that sounds nothing like a polka. At least I don't hear that damn motorcycle anymore. (Looking at the stack of mail in his hands) Got the wrong damn mail again. (Reading) Jesus (Jeezus) Rodriguez. Christ! Who names their kid Jeezus? (Opens kitchen door and shouts) Hey! Rodriguez! Come get your mail!*

MIRIAM. Be nice. Having neighbors is like a marriage – you have to be willing to overlook a few things. Make an effort.

FRANK. I tried. Saw the old lady once hanging clothes. I tried to make conversation. Pointed to her daughter – the pregnant one. She nodded and said something – I think – about being embarrassed! Girl's probably not married. But she *smiled* when she said it. I don't understand these people.

MIRIAM *is about to respond when FRANKIE and CLAUDETTE enter.*

MIRIAM. Frank – look who's here!

FRANKIE. Mom. Dad. This is Claudette. I was showing her Daddy's workbench.

CLAUDETTE. *(To FRANK)* She still has the birdhouse you two built together. She *loves* that thing. The other day we had *another* earthquake. Glass and picture frames all over the place – and she runs for a wooden birdhouse. Not to mention, it's wrapped up in so much bubble-wrap it looks like the Michelin man *(To FRANKIE)* or like you when you were a little girl in that what did you call it?

FRANKIE. Snowsuit. *(By way of explanation)* California girl. I was showing Claudette some old family photos.

CLAUDETTE. You look like you were totally immobilized.

FRANKIE. I was. Once we went sledding. Remember Mom? – over in St. Charles. I fell off and I couldn't move, couldn't get up. If someone hadn't been there to help me get up, I would've froze to death!

FRANKIE. Claudette's an animator. We met at the zoo. She was doing sketches. Remember how you used to take me on Sundays to Brookfield? I still love going to zoos.

MIRIAM.. *(Enthusiastically)* Maybe we can go on Sunday.

HECTOR *knocks from offstage.*

FRANK. C'mon in.

HECTOR. *(Not noticing Frankie and the others at first)* I have some of *your* mail, too.

MIRIAM *quickly butts between HECTOR and FRANK,* trying to get at the mail.

FRANK *(to MIRIAM)* What's gotten into you?

HECTOR *(Looking at the mail, still in his hand)* Francis Barkowski?

FRANK. *(Brusquely)* Frank.

MIRIAM *(Taking the mail from his hands)* He doesn't let anyone call him Francis – except his mother.

FRANK. *(Motioning towards the kitchen table)* Yours is on the table.

HECTOR *picks up his mail. As he glances at one particular piece, a pained expression briefly crosses his face.*

MIRIAM *nudges FRANK,* wanting him to do the introductions.

FRANK. Hector. *(Impatiently)* Hector!

HECTOR *looks up.*

FRANK. Uh, this is my daughter, Francine.

FRANKIE *(Sticks out her hand.)* Frankie.

FRANK. And her roommate, Claudette. *(Then, by way of explanation)* Rents are high in San Francisco.

HECTOR. Here, too. There's nothing like owning your own place—huh, Frank? Your own backyard. Room for a tree, a garden...

FRANK. About that apple tree of yours. It hangs over the fence. Apples are dropping all over the lawn.

HECTOR. Take all you want!

FRANK *is about to respond.*

MIRIAM *interrupts.* Thank you! And I have something for you (*steering him away from FRANK*) Tomatoes! Take as many as you like. You'd be doing us a favor. Frank is tired of them. But I think this is the last of them. Anyway, Frank has to be the only man on the planet who *prefers* storebought.

FRANK. I can *buy* my own tomatuhs.

FRANKIE (*Wanting to leave*) I'm going to show Claudette our room.

FRANKIE *and* CLAUDETTE *exit.*

MIRIAM. I'm just going to get you something to put those tomatoes in. (*Exits.*)

HECTOR. She your only kid?

FRANK *nods.* I guess I can forget about grandkids.

HECTOR. I have one like that, too.

FRANK. (*Confused*) One like what?

HECTOR (*Flustered. Realizing his mistake.*) A redhead.

FRANK. (*Surprised*) Yeah. And stubborn that one. I don't know where she gets it from.

CURTAIN

## SCENE II

*Later that day. In the kitchen.*

MIRIAM (*Getting it over with*) I'm sorry your father won't be with us tomorrow, but he and Walter have been planning to go to this gun show for months. It's all the way in Galesburg. He promised Walter he'd go and if he doesn't Walter won't have anyone to drive with. It's this weekend only. Oh, but they're driving home tomorrow night so we'll have Sunday and then the whole week together.

FRANKIE. That's okay. I know we didn't give you a lot of warning....So, how's the garden coming along this year? It looks great.

MIRIAM (*Smiles*) You think so? Dad says I'm just feeding the rabbits again. (*Laughs*) They keep outsmarting him. Every year he tries something different. This year he tried chicken wire. Next he wants to try barbed wire or an electric fence! But I won't let him. I love the bunnies. They're my allies. They help me keep your father humble.

CLAUDETTE. Those wascally wabbits.

MIRIAM (*Tickled*) Oh lord, don't let Frankie's father hear you. It's gotten so bad I don't dare serve carrots for fear of reminding him.

*An ear-piercing alarm goes off.*

FRANKIE. What on earth is that?!

MIRIAM. Another false alarm...That's our new "Home Security System." It's one of the "improvements" that realtor woman suggested. It keeps going off. I think it's squirrels—or the rabbits. (*To CLAUDETTE*) Frankie's father takes pride in taking good care of us—and in keeping us safe. He wasn't hard to convince. Home security is right up his alley.

FRANKIE. For my birthday last year he sent me a deadbolt!

MIRIAM. I suggested we just get one of those fake decoy stickers for the windows—but *rabbits* can't read! (*She cracks up.*)

CLAUDETTE. Well, I better go unpack—and I don't want to be rude, but I have a couple of e-mails I really have to send out. Thanks so much for welcoming me into your home. *(She exits)*

MIRIAM. I like her.

FRANKIE. Are you really going to sell?

MIRIAM. Your father wants to.

FRANKIE. He's been saying that for years.

MIRIAM. This time I think he means it.

FRANKIE. He can't be happy about the neighbors. I saw the oil stain on their driveway.

MIRIAM. He's never happy with the neighbors. First it was the O'Malleys. Then it was the Morettis....

FRANKIE. Think I could talk him into moving to California?

MIRIAM and FRANKIE *together, imitating FRANK*. "Where the fruits and nuts come from"? *(They laugh)*

FRANKIE. Daddy wouldn't have to shovel snow, or rake leaves. No more cleaning the gutters...

MIRIAM. And what *would* he do with himself? Your father has to have something to do, something to fight against. We *both* need something to occupy ourselves with. I have my garden, he has the yard.

FRANKIE. You could garden in California. *Everything* grows in California. All year long. Even in winter. Wouldn't it be nice to--?

MIRIAM. I'd be okay. But your father has to stay busy too. Last Christmas your Aunt Rose sent him one of those blankets you see on t.v. --the Forever Lazy. He wouldn't even try it on. "What next," he said, "the Hopeless Slacker?"

FRANKIE. *I* was thinking of getting Dad a Bears jersey this year. A real official one—with his name on it and everything. What do you think?

MIRIAM. *(Bluntly)* He wouldn't wear it. He thinks it's silly grown men dressing like kids.



FRANKIE (*Frustrated*) I *tried* to get him more of those plaid, flannel shirts that he likes. Not even Sears sells that kind of clothes anymore. We used to be able to pick them up while he was buying a new wrench or paying off the drier or whatever at Sears. Home Depot doesn't have a men's *clothing* department.

MIRIAM. I got a catalogue the other day from a place in Minnesota. They still have just the kind of shirts your father likes. A bit pricy but...

FRANKIE. Speaking of gifts, why don't you ever use the microwave I gave you?

MIRIAM. Your father doesn't like –

FRANKIE. Your whole life you've been doing what Dad wants. What about *you*? What about what *you* want?

MIRIAM. I *enjoy* cooking for your father. And I *do* use it – whenever your father's away on one of his fishing trips with Walter. (*Proving she has eaten them*) They have all kinds of dinners now – orange chicken, even salmon—and they're really good. Not like those horrible things they had when they *first* came out. Remember that rubbery roast turkey and that spongy stuffing that stuck to the tin?

FRANKIE. So if they're so good now, why don't you eat them all the time? It's because of Daddy.

MIRIAM. If I ate them all the time, they wouldn't be special and I wouldn't enjoy them as much. It's like those fancy coffee makers that they make nowadays. Clara has one – her daughter got it for her for Christmas. She used to love stopping for coffee at that little place in the mall. Now she hardly ever wants to go there. Why should she? She can make just as good at home. Anyway, I'll be using it again soon-- in November. Your dad and Walter are going to Wisconsin on a hunting trip.

FRANKIE. Hunting?! You always said you'd *divorce* Daddy if he ever went on one of those trips. You said it would be like killing Bambi!

MIRIAM. Well, you know they never kill the young ones—or the mothers. There are strict rules and anyway, you know your father would never—

FRANKIE. You're giving in to him again. (*An accusation*)

MIRIAM. Well, he's been wanting to go for years and this may be his last chance. Walter's friend is thinking of selling the cabin. It's a good time to sell. Your father is very excited about it. He and Walter have been planning it for months. Didn't you notice all the camping gear in the garage? It looks like they're outfitting a whole battalion.

FRANKIE. I didn't notice but I'll tell you what I *did* see in the garage – the computer I sent Dad for Christmas. It's not even out of the box! He'll use a snow blower or a leaf blower, but when I give him something that could bring us closer together he's like a caveman seeing fire for the first time. (*Imitates.*)

MIRIAM *slaps her!*

FRANKIE. You know I'm right. He's always buying some new kind of fancy drill or something, so why *can't* he learn to use a computer?

MIRIAM. That's different.

FRANKIE. *How* is it different?

MIRIAM. He can understand *those* things. He can take them apart and see how they work. But these computers make him feel stupid.