

A Home of Our Own

Part 1

This is a story about Frances Lacey, a single mother, and her six children. The movie is narrated in parts by her oldest son Shayne. He is fifteen. He explains that what we are about to see is a true story. The story is set in 1962.

As the movie begins, Frances is at work at a potato chip factory. One of her supervisors touches her inappropriately and she gets very angry. She pushes him away and starts screaming at him. She throws a handful of chips at his head. (Nowadays, the supervisor would be fired for sexual harassment, but this was 1962.) The boss sees the commotion on the floor of the factory and comes out. He is angry at Frances for causing trouble. She tries to plead her case, but he fires her. When she walks out to the parking lot, she sees that her car has a flat tire. She is having a very bad day.

Frances and her children live in a dumpy, crime-infested apartment. When she gets home, she tells the kids to pipe down because she is tired and she wants to relax. She notices that there are a lot of candy wrappers on the floor. She did not give them money for candy, so she asks them where the candy came from. None of them will tell her. Just then there is a knock on the door. Her oldest son is standing between two police officers. He was caught stealing money from pay phones. She yells at the police officers. She thinks they should be out catching real criminals. However, after she slams the door, she starts yelling at her son. She is very angry that he lied to her about how he was making money. She tells him to go get his father's belt.

Later that night, she is sitting at the table thinking. She decides to move her family out of the city. She believes this is the only way she can raise them properly. Shayne doesn't want to move. She reminds him that he made a promise to her when his father died, that he would be the man of the family and help her with the younger kids. She promises him that if he does this, they will never move again.

Part 2

So Frances and her children sell what they can, pack up their old car, and drive away. The trip is difficult. They eat egg salad sandwiches for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. They drink Kool-aid. They sleep by the side of the road. The kids fight in the car. None of them are in seat belts, and one of them is riding against the back window. At one point, Frances decides to let Shayne take the steering wheel so she can relax. The kids look at the houses that they pass and dream about living in one of them.

Then the car breaks down so they have to push it to the nearest gas station. It needs a lot of repairs: the radiator, the belts, and the tires. Frances has no money, so she offers the mechanic her gold wedding ring in exchange for the repairs. He is reluctant to take it, but she insists, saying that she is not sentimental.

Finally, after crossing three states, they enter Idaho. Frances knows what she is looking for. Suddenly she sees a broken down house by the side of the road. She stops the car, and they all go over to look at it more closely. When she opens the door, it falls in. There are chickens inside. The kids jump on an old mattress. The house has no walls, and the roof is not finished.

They walk to the house across the road to find out about this property. They find a man, Mr. Moon, busy sharpening a tool in his greenhouse. He assumes they are interested in buying some berries, so he tells them that the season is over. Frances asks him if he knows who owns that property across the road. He says that he does. She smiles and says that she wants to buy it, but she admits that she doesn't have any money. He is annoyed. How is she planning to pay for it? She asks him if he lives alone and he says yes. She offers to provide eight hours a week of chores from her oldest son, plus dishes every day, and laundry and house cleaning once a week. He is not sure he wants her and her noisy tribe living next door. But Frances is determined and Mr. Moon finally agrees to the deal. Frances promises she will never leave as long as she is breathing.

Part 3

The Lacey family gets three acres of land and the unfinished house. They all work putting up a roof and walls. All the kids can use hammers, nails, and saws. Frances goes into town to look for a job at the bowling alley. She talks to the owner. He asks her what she can do, and she says, “work.” She is a hard worker and she learns fast. He admits that he is looking for a waitress. She says, “Well, you found one!” She will get paid minimum wage, plus tips. The manager, Norman, is listening to their conversation. He says a few things to Frances and she rolls her eyes.

Shayne gets a job at a dairy. He bales hay and takes care of the cows. He doesn’t like it very much, but he needs to earn money. On the other hand, Shayne enjoys doing chores for Mr. Moon that involve driving the tractor. Two of the younger children paint their name and address on the mailbox.

Mr. Moon is very enthusiastic about helping the Lacey family build their house. One day he brings over some windows. He has made them out of left over glass and wood from his greenhouse. Frances says she can’t pay him. He explains that he doesn’t want to be paid. He is trying to be helpful. However, Frances is uncomfortable owing anything to anyone, so she insists on giving him an IOU. She asks him not to back her into a corner again.

When fall comes, the family goes shopping at the church basement for some second-hand clothes for school. The parish priest introduces himself and invites Frances and her family to Sunday service. Frances politely declines. Then he offers Frances some free clothes and food. Frances declines, a little less politely. She explains that the Lacey’s do not accept charity.

The younger children are interested in toys, but Frances shakes her head. She considers buying a blouse for herself, but then changes her mind. She sees some bolts of fabric and decides to make dresses for her daughters.

When the kids start school, all the girls are wearing identical dresses. The other kids make fun of them. The youngest Lacey girl takes off her dress and throws it in the garbage and then runs up the stairs to go to class.

Part 4

One day, during the bus ride home from school, Murray demands that the driver stop the bus so he can get off. He sees a salvage yard by the side of the road. This is Murray's idea of heaven. He walks around the yard, looking at all the great stuff. He makes his way into the small office where the owner, Mr. King, is doing some paperwork. Mr. King asks him if he is lost. Murray says no--he just wants some of this stuff. Mr. King looks at him and asks him if he has any money. Murray says that he has learned there are more ways to get things in this world than by using money. (He has learned to barter from his mother.) Mr. King starts to laugh. Murray is an unusual kid, and he likes him. They are kindred spirits. They work out a deal where Murray works three days a week for Mr. King. In return, he gets to bring home stuff. The first thing Murray brings home is a toilet. Over the next month, Murray brings home different things, including French doors, cracked china, and a couch.

One day, Fay is dusting in Mr. Moon's living room. She notices a picture. She asks him, "Where is Mrs. Moon?" He tells her that Mrs. Moon went on a long voyage ahead of him. She asks, "Why didn't you go with her?" He looks at her and says he had to wait for the Lacey family.

Shayne is having a hard time adjusting. He has to walk from work to school every morning, about four miles. While he is walking, he thinks about how much he hates Idaho.

The kids continue to work on the house. One day, Murray is on the second floor, hanging onto a rail and pulling off pieces of wood. He drops one on the ground dangerously close to where Fay is sitting. He tries to pull off another one and loses his balance and falls to the ground. He starts to cough. Shayne starts screaming, scrambles down the ladder and helps Murray sit up. Annie and Craig yell at Shayne to look at Murray's back. There is a nail and a board impaled on it. Lynn runs to get Mr. Moon. Shayne warns Murray that it is going to hurt, and then he pulls the nail out of Murray's back. Murray starts to sob. Mr. Moon is not home, so Shayne picks Murray up and starts to carry him to the hospital. On the way, they meet Mr. Moon and Frances. They all pile into the car and go to the

hospital. Murray is lucky. Two centimeters difference and the nail would have punctured his lung. The doctor says to keep the wound clean and try and keep Murray in bed to rest. He adds that Murray is an unusual kid.

Part 5

Shayne is having a hard time adjusting to his new life. He understands that he made a promise to his mother, but he decides that when the house is finished, he will move back to LA. He is tired of being the father figure in his family. He misses his friends in LA. There is not much to do in Idaho, and it is too cold.

Sometimes Frances gets a tool instead of a tip from her customers at work. She is really happy when this happens. The family starts a money jar for the house, and everyone contributes what they can. Even though everybody is working hard on the house, there are still jobs that Frances needs to contract out. When she talks to the contractor, she is very firm. She tells him that she will get the materials herself; all she wants is labor. She explains that she will be paying cash, so the work will have to be done piecemeal. She makes her children line up and she shows the contractor their blistered hands. She says that every dollar she spends is a dollar those little hands earned. She promises to treat him fairly and wants to be treated fairly in return.

One day at school, Shayne gets in trouble with his gym teacher because his t-shirt is pink, instead of white. Shayne explains that some red socks accidentally got washed with the whites. The gym teacher tells him to get another shirt. Shayne explains that he does not have another shirt. The gym teacher humiliates him, and orders him to go sit on the bench with the girls, since he is wearing pink. Shayne goes over and sits down. There is a girl on the bench named Raimy. They keep glancing at each other and smiling. Shayne decides maybe there is one reason not to move back to LA.

Later, Shayne asks his mother for another shirt, but she is not sympathetic. She doesn't think the color of a t-shirt matters, and Lynn needs a compass and a protractor for math class. Shayne and his mother have different priorities.

Part 6

On Thanksgiving, Mr. Moon comes over with two pumpkin pies which he made. Faye isn't feeling well, so she is not at the table. The Lacey family and Mr. Moon all join hands and Mr. Moon says a prayer. He is thankful for many things, but especially the Lacey family who has turned his life upside down and made it interesting. He is also thankful for his clean house.

Later that night, Murray goes to the outhouse, but Frances is already there reading a magazine. It is cold, and he cannot hold it, so he goes inside. The outhouse seats two. He is embarrassed, and he keeps glancing at his mother. Finally she points out that she used to change his diapers but Murray is still uncomfortable. He says the next thing he wants to work on is indoor plumbing.

At work, Norman gives Frances a fuse box that a customer left as a tip. Then he asks her out on a date. He promises one beer, one dance, and then home. Frances agrees to go out with him. Later, when Frances comes home from her date, Shayne is angry. He wants to know why she is late. Frances explains, but Shayne is still angry. Then Frances gets angry and tells Shayne he needs to stay out of her personal life—what little of it she has.

As Christmas approaches, Frances suggests to her children that instead of buying presents for each other, they all buy presents for the house. One of the younger kids asks about Santa Claus, and Frances explains that they can write to Santa and ask him to bring presents for the house too. The kids agree, but they don't really understand what she is proposing.

On Christmas Eve, Shayne and Murray go window shopping. They are poor, so they can't afford much. But Shayne wants to get their mom a new pair of stockings. Murray is confused. What about the house presents? Shayne shrugs and says that was just talk. Shayne doesn't believe that his mother was serious.

That night they cut down a tree with Mr. Moon. All the kids take baths. They don't have indoor plumbing, so taking a bath is an ordeal. They all use the same water, but they pour in a pan or two of hot water at the start of each person's bath.

Murray has to go last because he is always the dirtiest. Frances cleans Murray's ears. She says he could grow potatoes in there.

Then someone knocks on the door. It is the priest. He explains that the church gives presents to needy children. Frances doesn't like the word "needy." Her kids don't have everything they want, but they have everything they need. She tells the priest there are no needy children there, and he should go find some. Then she wishes him a Merry Christmas and closes the door in his face.

The next morning, the kids wake up really early. They are very excited! They drag their mom out of bed, go find their presents, and sit around the table. On the count of three, they rip open their presents. One by one they look at what they have received and their faces fall: a box of nails, a hammer, some drill bits, a level. They are really disappointed, except for Murray. He actually likes his tool. Frances opens her present from Lynn—a pair of slippers. She thanks Lynn, and then looks around the table. She realizes that something is wrong. She reminds them that they talked about presents for the house. Shayne loses his temper. He starts yelling that this is not a house—it's a shack—and this is not Christmas. He says they have NOTHING of their own. It's supposed to be Christmas. All they wanted was a toy. He accuses her of caring more about the house than of any of them. Frances slaps him, and tells him to go and get the belt. All the other kids start weeping.

Just then, Mr. Moon arrives wishing everyone a Merry Christmas. He can tell something is wrong. The kids bring him his present—a mailbox they made for him. He tells Frances he knows she said no presents, but he has a present for the house. It is a set of blueprints. Frances says she appreciates it, but she is set on building her house her own way. She hands back the plans. Mr. Moon looks at her closely. He tells her she is a stubborn woman. Then he asks what is wrong. Annie says that Santa Claus hates her. All the kids are still crying. Frances asks Mr. Moon for a ride into town.

Frances goes to the church to find the priest. She is embarrassed. She asks him if he still has any of those gifts. He says that he is sorry, no, but that he took her advice and gave them to a truly needy family. He suggests that the best gift she could give her kids would be to bring them to a church service.

Part 7

On the way home, Frances asks Mr. Moon why he never finished building the old house. He explains that it was supposed to be for his son and his daughter-in-law. His son had joined the air force as a statement of his patriotism during the Korean War. He was shot down and never returned. Mr. Moon's wife died shortly after that. Mr. Moon reminds Frances that when she first saw the house, she saw its potential. Frances apologizes for not even looking at the blueprints. Mr. Moon tells her she has a right to build the kind of house she wants. They wish each other a Merry Christmas.

That night, Lynn encourages her mother to open her other present. She leads Frances to a chair and puts her new slippers on her feet. Frances says how tired she is. Lynn suggests she should go to bed but Frances says it's not that kind of tired. She explains that she feels like she is pushing a car with all the kids inside up a steep hill. Lynn points out that all the kids are outside the car, helping her push. Frances acknowledges the truth of that. Then Frances opens her present. It is the blouse she admired, but didn't buy that day in the fall in the church basement thrift store.

It is a long winter without much to do. Frances is dating Norman. One night he drops her off and they kiss goodnight. The kids are all around the table when Shayne notices that Craig has colored in his history book so he gets really upset. His mother warns him to stop yelling. Then Shayne realizes that his homework is missing. He starts to shake Craig and scream at him. Frances loses her temper and tells him to go get the belt. He defiantly tells her to get it herself. She does, and starts to hit him. All the other kids are wailing and covering their ears. Lynn tries to get her to stop. Shayne curls up into a ball and takes the blows.

Shayne doesn't speak to his mother for five days after that. One evening he is sitting in the car when Frances joins him. They talk about Shayne's father. Frances tells Shayne she understands he doesn't want to be the man of the house. She understands he has no friends, and he has grown up responsibilities. She tells him that her life isn't what she planned either. She says, "You work with what you get and try to make it better."

Shayne and Frances stand outside the house and Frances describes what improvements they will make in the future. Then Shayne apologizes to his mother about getting mad because she was dating. He asks her if he can go out on a date. She says yes. They go back to the thrift store and buy shoes, pants, and a jacket. On the big night, they both spend time getting ready. Frances is going on her own date. As Shayne is leaving, Frances slips him a dollar. Shayne understands what that represents.

Shayne is shy and nervous, but he and Raimy start to dance and he has a great time.

Part 8

Meanwhile, Frances is out on her date with Norman. Norman pulls into the parking lot of a motel, next to the dance hall. They get out of the car and Norman starts dancing with Frances in the parking lot. At first she laughs and she tells him that she wants to go to the dance. He shows her the key to a motel room and says that he wants to go there first. Frances is not interested. Norman is very insistent, and Frances starts to get angry. She tells him that that is never going to happen. He says some insulting things to her and she gets really angry. She tells him to take his hands off her. By now Norman is really angry too, and he clenches his fist in her face and threatens her. He says he can make her. She looks him in the eye and says, "You can try."

Later, Shayne gets dropped off at his house. Before he gets out of the car, he and Raimy kiss for awhile. He had a really good time at the dance. As he is walking into the house, he notices his mother sitting in their old car. He goes up to the window to talk to her. She is upset, but she is trying not to show it. She asks him how his date was. He asks her how her date was. She turns her head and he can see her bloody lip and her black eye. She tells him that she made a mistake going out with Norman. They talk about Shayne's father, and what a wonderful man he was. Shayne helps Frances into the house and he cleans off her face. She asks him to promise that he will never beat up a woman, or anyone, because it really hurts. He promises. Later that night, all the kids wake up when they hear a noise outside. They go to the window and see Frances out in the snow nailing the belt to a tree. She is crying.

The next day, Shayne goes to the bowling alley to look for Norman. He sees him, runs over to him, and jumps on his back. They fall to the floor. Shayne punches him and screams, "You hit my mother." Norman gets up. He is taller and heavier than Shayne. He throws Shayne against the wall a few times. He says, "You fight just like you mother." Then he punches Shayne in the stomach and Shayne crumples to the floor.

Later Frances goes to the bowling alley to talk to her boss. She explains that she can't work there anymore because of what Norman did to her boy. The boss gently tells her that he fired Norman, and so if Norman was the problem, he is no longer the problem. He tells Frances to take the day off. He tells her things will get better. Frances is very relieved and she leaves the bowling alley.

Part 9

Back at home, Murray unveils his new project: indoor plumbing. The whole family gathers around him as he demonstrates how the toilet flushes. The next day, he decides that they don't need the outhouse anymore, so he gets a can of gasoline and starts throwing gas on the sides of the outhouse. Then he lights a roll of toilet paper and starts the outhouse on fire. Shayne notices what he is doing and comes down from the roof. At first he yells at Murray, but then he gets rather excited about watching the outhouse burn.

Meanwhile the girls are inside sorting the laundry. Lynn looks up and notices a spark on the roof. She runs outside and gets Shayne's attention. He realizes what is happening and he instructs two of the younger kids to go to Mr. Moon's and call the fire department. Then he yells at Murray to come up on the roof. They try to beat the fire down with their coats, but it is too big and out of control. Mr. Moon comes over and tries to hook up a hose, but the water pump is frozen. He tells the boys to get off the roof. Lynn realizes the money jar is inside and she goes into the burning house to look for it.

Frances is getting a ride home from a friend. They both notice the cloud of black smoke in the distance. The friend says, "Isn't there where you live?" When Frances arrives she quickly asks all her children if they are alright. She doesn't see Lynn, so she starts screaming her name. Lynn comes stumbling out of the house, coughing. She is crying because she couldn't find the money jar.

The family huddles together and watches the house burn. By the time the fire department arrives, the house is completely consumed by flames. Murray apologizes to Frances. He feels it is his fault. Frances comforts him and tells him that it was nobody's fault—it was an accident.

The next day they sift through the rubble. The kids pick out the nails to reuse. Frances finds the money jar and says everything will be fine. Shayne loses his patience. He has lost hope. He feels his mother is lying to them by promising that if they work hard, everything will be fine, because it won't. Frances yells back and tells him that this is the life they have and life isn't fair. She says that if he wants,

he can go back to L.A. and they will manage without him. Just then, a caravan of cars drives up. It's Mr. Moon, and the contractor, and Mr. King, and the priest, and Frances' boss, and other people from the town. They have come to rebuild the house. Frances tells Mr. Moon she cannot accept charity. He tells her he knows that, and she will get a bill, but she cannot stop them. They are going to do it, no matter what she says. Then he hugs her and tells her everything is going to be OK. Other people arrive with blankets and toys for the kids. Frances and her kids help rebuild the house. It takes six months to finish and four years to pay everybody back. When it is finished, the whole family poses in front of the house for a picture. They finally have a home of their own. Shayne, the narrator, explains that he never went back to L.A. and that he still lives in Idaho.