

A CHRISTMAS STORY

A film based on Original
Material by Jean Shepherd

Screenplay by

Jean Shepherd

Bob Clark

Leigh Brown

ed

SHOOTING SCRIPT

December 7, 1982

"A CHRISTMAS STORY"

SPECIFIC SCENE BREAKDOWN - NOT NOTED IN SCRIPT

Page	7	9pt	EXT. BACKYARD - Ralphie's POV - Day
		9pt	MED SHOT - RALPHIE - KITCHEN - Day
		9pt	LONG SHOT - THE YARD - Day
		9pt	THE FAMILY KITCHEN - Day
Page	37	25pt	INT. BEDROOM - Day "Ralphie is lost in his reverie"
Page	40	26pt	RALPHIE'S BEDROOM - Dusk "in reality, Ralphie hears a voluminous racket..."
Page	41	27pt	INT/EXT RALPHIE'S POV - THE BUMPUS HOUSE - Day "The house is surrounded..."
Page	58	35pt	RALPHIE & REALITY - INT. CLASSROOM - Day Miss Shields - "Did you want something Ralphie"
Page	65	41pt	EXT. ROAD - Night "Ralph gets out of the car"
Page	80	53pt	RANDY RACES PAST RALPH INTO THE BATHROOM
Page	81	53pt	THE BATHROOM DOOR FLIES OPEN
Page	90	62pt	CLOSE-UP - RANDY UNDER THE SINK - BATHROOM - Day
Page	91	62pt	BEDROOM
Page	113	74pt	HOUSE "Ralphie dashes into the house..."

Please make a notation in your script re the above breakdown.

1. EXT. THE STEEL MILLS LOOM - LONG SHOT - DUSK

1.

Graphic says Northern Indiana, sometime in the 1940's.

FADE UP TO FIND Hohman, a steel town squatting beside Lake Michigan; CAMERA PANS the city, then begins a SERIES OF CUTS to show ever more microcosmic views of Hohman. The NARRATOR'S VOICE (JEAN SHEPHERD) fades up. We hear a MEDLEY OF CLASSIC CHRISTMAS CAROLS which form a striking contrast to the images.

RALPHIE, FLICK and SCHWARTZ run across a slag heap in foreground. RANDY trails behind.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Hohman, Indiana. It clings precariously to the underbody of Chicago like a barnacle clings to the rotting hulk of a tramp steamer. On the far horizon, beyond the railroad yards and the great refinery tanks, lay our own mysterious, private mountain range. Dark and mysterious, cold and uninhabited, the steel mills stacked like malignant dominoes against the steel gray skies.

2. EXT. JUNKYARD - DUSK

2.

Kids run past delapidated fence.

NARRATOR (V.O. Cont'd)

Early December had seen the first of the great blizzards of that year. The wind howling down out of the Canadian wilds a few hundred miles to the North screamed over frozen Lake Michigan...

3. EXT. PULASKIS' CANDY STORE - DUSK

3.

Kids race by, Randy trails.

(CONTINUED)

3. CONTINUED

3.

NARRATOR (V.O. Cont'd)
and hit Hohman, laying on the town
great drifts of snow and long,
story-high icicles and sub-zero
temperatures where the air cracked
and sang, streetcar wires creaked
under caked ice and kids plodded
to school through 45 miles an hour
gales, tilting forward like tiny,
furred radiator ornaments.

4. EXT. DOWNTOWN HOHMAN - NIGHT

4.

Filled with cars and shoppers.

NARRATOR

But over it all, like a faint, thin
off-stage chorus was the building
excitement. Christmas was on its
way. Each day was more exciting
than the last, because Christmas
was one day closer.

5. EXT. DOWNTOWN HOHMAN - TRACKING SHOT - KIDS WEAVING
AMONGST SHOPPERS - NIGHT

5.

NARRATOR

Lovely, beautiful, glorious
Christmas, around which the entire
kid year revolved. Downtown Hohman
was prepared for its yearly
Bacchanalia of peace on earth and
good will to men.

6. EXT. HIGBEE'S DEPT. STORE - EXTRAS - NIGHT

6.

CAMERA CUTS TO A WIDE SHOT of Higbee's Department
Store window. Citizens stand "oohing" and "aahing"
in front of the Yule splendor. CAMERA MOVES IN TOWARD
the window.

NARRATOR

Higbee's Department Stores' corner
window was traditionally a major high-
water mark of the pre-Christmas season.
It set the tone, the motif of their
giant Yuletide Jubilee. Kids were
brought in from miles around just to
see the window.

(CONTINUED)

6. CONTINUED

6.

NARRATOR (V.O. Cont'd)

Old codgers would recall vintage years when the window had flowered more fulsomely than in ordinary times. This was one of those years. The magnificent display had been officially unveiled on a crowded Saturday night. It was an instant smash hit.

CAMERA PANS the rapt faces peering in. One little boy RALPHIE comes bobbing up between the legs of a startled grownup. We see FLICK, SCHWARTZ and RANDY also.

NARRATOR (Cont'd)

First nights packed earmuff to earmuff, their steamy breath clouding up the sparkling plate glass, jostled in rapt admiration before a golden, tinkling panoply of mechanized electronic joy.

CAMERA PANS the window. Over this SHOT we see the OPENING TITLES.

This is the heyday of the Seven Dwarfs and their virginal den mother Snow White. Walt Disney's seven cutie-pies hammer and chisel and paint while Santa, bouncing Snow White on his mechanical knee, ho-ho-ho's through eight strategically placed loudspeakers -- interspersed by choruses of "Heigh ho, heigh ho, it's off to work we go". Grumpy sits at the controls of a miniature eight-wheel Rock Island Road steam engine and Sleepy plays a marimba, while in the background, inexplicably, Mrs. Claus ceaselessly irons a red shirt. Sparkling artificial snow drifts down on Shirley Temple dolls, Flexible Flyers, and Tinker Toy sets glowing in the golden spotlight. In the foreground a frontier stockade built of Lincoln Logs is manned by a company of kilted lead Highlanders who are doughtily fending off an attack by six U.S. Army medium tanks. (History has always been vague in Indiana.) A few feet away stands an Arthurian cardboard castle with Raggedy Andy sitting on the drawbridge, his feet in the moat, through which a Lionel freight train burping real smoke goes round and round. Dopey sits in Amos and Andy's pedal-operated Fresh Air Taxicab beside a stuffed panda holding a lollipop in his paw, bearing the heart-tugging legend, "Hug Me".

(CONTINUED)

6. CONTINUED:

6.

From fluffy cotton clouds above, Dionne quintuplet dolls wearing plaid golf knickers hang from billowing parachutes, having just bailed out of a high-flying balsawood Fokker triplane. All in all, Santa's workshop makes Salvador Dali look like Norman Rockwell.

NARRATOR

It was a good year. Maybe even a great one. Like a swelling Christmas balloon, the excitement mounted until the whole town tossed restlessly in bed -- and made plans for the big day. Already my own scheme was well under way, a scheme whose Machiavellian brilliance and Olympian perserverance made that Christmas stand out among Christmases past.

CAMERA PANS FROM Ralphie's rapt fact TO the beaming face of Red Ryder, who is hustling the Daisy BB rifle to aching kids everywhere. We DISSOLVE TO the entranced face of Ralphie.

7. INT. RALPH PARKER'S HOUSE - DAY

7.

CAMERA PULLS BACK to reveal that Ralphie is reading "Boy's Life." Downstairs we hear the hectic routine of a school morning. The omnipresent RADIO CRACKLES in the background. Ralphie's FATHER, hereafter known as The Old Man, roars dimly in the distance as he fights the good fight against the indefatigable Indiana winter. Ralphie's MOTHER calls intermittently the waning minutes before school deadline.

NARRATOR

I remember clearly, itchingly, nervously, maddeningly the first time I laid eyes on it, pictured in a three-color smeared illustration in a full-page back cover ad in 'Boy's Life.'

CAMERA CUTS to Ralphie's POV and STARTS A SLOW ZOOM INTO the smiling face of Red Ryder. We see the following copy on the page:

(CONTINUED)

7. CONTINUED

7.

BOYS! AT LAST YOU CAN OWN AN OFFICIAL RED RYDER CARBINE ACTION TWO HUNDRED SHOT RANGE MODEL AIR RIFLE.

NARRATOR (Cont'd)
Red Ryder, his jaw squared,
staring out at me manfully, and
speaking directly to me eye to
eye. In his hand was the knurled
stock of as beautiful, as coolly
deadly looking a piece of
weaponry as I'd ever laid eyes on.

CAMERA PANS OVER its page, seeing the following copy
as we hear Ralphie begin reading it out loud to himself.

RALPH (O.S.)
Yes, fellows, this two-hundred
shot carbine action air rifle,
just like the one I used in all
my range wars chasin' them
rustlers and bad guys can be
your very own! It has a special
built-in secret compass in the
stock for telling the direction
if you're lost on the trail, and
also an official Red Ryder
sundial for telling time out in
the wilds. You just lay your
cheek 'gainst this stock, sight
over my own special design
cloverleaf sight, and you just
can't miss. Tell Dad it's great
for target shooting and varmits,
and it will make a swell Christmas
gift!

The SOUND of Ralph's VOICE REVERBERATES AND ECHOES.

RALPH (O.S.)
(continuing)
Make a swell Christmas gift,
Make a swell Christmas gift,
Make a swell Christmas gift.

CAMERA CUTS TO Ralphie and begins a SLOW ZOOM INTO his
eyes.

(CONTINUED)

7. CONTINUED

7.

NARRATOR

A swell Christmas gift! Here was Red Ryder himself nailing me, his pal Ralphie with his calculatingly demonic underplay -- knowing full well that it was not merely a swell Christmas gift but the Christmas gift -- the quintessential Christmas gift, the Holy Grail of Christmas gifts. For the first time in my life the initial symptoms of genuine lunacy, of mania set in.

CAMERA HAS ARRIVED AT AN EXTREMELY CLOSE SHOT of Ralphie's eye. We DISSOLVE to the following, which is Ralphie's daydream fantasy.

DISSOLVE TO:

8. INT. RALPH'S KITCHEN - EXTREME CLOSEUP - RALPHIE'S EYE - DAY

8.

CAMERA PULLS BACK to see Ralphie on one knee, his trusty Red Ryder air rifle at the ready. As CAMERA CONTINUES TO PULL BACK we see Ralphie's Father huddle in the corner, his arms about Ralphie's Mother, whose eyes roll with cosmic fear. At her feet, RANDY, Ralphie's brother, is clasped in his mother's desperate arms, his fingernails poised before his chattering teeth. His eyes stare as if they beheld the coming of the millenium. Ralphie's Father speaks:

FATHER

Save us, Ralphie!

(pause)

For your mother's sake.

CLOSEUP - RALPHIE

NARRATOR

With Herculean calm Ralphie turns to them.

RALPHIE

Don't worry, Dad. As long as I got Ol' Blue.

(CONTINUED)

8. CONTINUED

8.

He holds up his BB air rifle.

Then CAMERA CUTS BEHIND what is obviously the kitchen sink of Ralphie's house. Slowly Ralphie's face appears over the edge. The steely eyes survey the scene before him.

9. EXT. BACKYARD - RALPHIE'S POV - DAY

9.

Looking past the kitchen faucet and out the kitchen window we see what Ralphie sees! At various points across the backyard, desperate men are creeping on their bellies across the snow toward the house. There are about eight of them, and each wears a thin Bandit-Burglar type black mask, the kind that looks like goggles. They all wear striped shirts and carry blackjacks. One nears the house; two are slinking over the fence. One crawls through the garage door.

MED. SHOT - RALPHIE

He surveys the situation coolly, then fast as a whip-snake he leaps up and snaps off THREE SHOTS.

LONG SHOT - THE YARD

Three bad guys leap acrobatically into the air, mortally wounded. The others stand up, stricken into dumbness by the sting of "Ol' Blue." They race unceremoniously and plunge headlong over the fence and disappear down the alley. We...

CUT BACK TO:

THE FAMILY

They cheer wildly, embracing Ralphie. Ralphie stands tolerating this stoically but kindly.

FAMILY

You saved us, Ralphie, you saved us!
We were all goners, Ralphie,
and you saved us!.

(CONTINUED)

9. CONTINUED

9.

RALPHIE

(manfully)

Me and Ol' Blue. Of course,
there was some that didn't want
me to have 'Ol Blue...

CLOSEUP - THE FAMILY

NARRATOR

They look down in abject
humiliation under my stern,
but kindly reprimand. The truth
had smote them!

CLOSEUP - RALPHIE

NARRATOR

I turned away after a moment,
staring into the danger zone
bravely; heroically, with just a
trace showing in my eyes of that
distant hurt that was afflicted
upon me by my now contrite
family.

Suddenly Ralphie is startled and we hear a voice.

BACK TO REALITY

MOTHER (O.S.)

Ralphie! Randy! Downstairs in
two minutes.

10. INT. BEDROOM - RALPHIE - DAY

10.

We realize Ralphie has been jarred out of his fantasy
by his mother's voice. He leaps up and scurries to get
ready. Randy plunges into the drawer and starts to do
his Little Brother thing. Two minutes means two
minutes.

(CONTINUED)

10. CONTINUED

10.

NARRATOR

Mothers know nothing about creeping marauders burrowing through the snow toward the kitchen where only you and you alone stand between your tiny huddled family and insensate Evil. There was no question about it. Not only should I have such a gun -- it was an absolute necessity! Race memories of Kid plots through the ages began to surge through my cortex into conscious strategy.

11. INT. PARENTS' BEDROOM - RALPH - DAY

11.

CAMERA FOLLOWS Ralphie into his parents' room where we see him pick up a copy of "Screen Romances" and slip "Boy's Life" between the covers.

NARRATOR

My mother, grabbing for her copy of 'Screen Romances' would find herself cleverly euchered into reading a Red Ryder sales pitch.

MOTHER (O.S.)

Ralphie! Randy!

MED. SHOT - THE HALLWAY

CAMERA FOLLOWS Randy and Ralphie down the hallway, LOSING Randy and FOLLOWING Ralphie to the bathroom door. He barges in and we find The Old Man in the final strokes of shaving. He looks down at Ralphie. Ralphie cleverly puts the "Boy's Life" behind his back.

FATHER

Whatcha got there?

RALPHIE

(succinctly)

Nothin'.

(CONTINUED)

11. CONTINUED

11.

NARRATOR

'Nothin'' -- the classic kid rejoinder of all time. If only the victims of the Inquisition had understood the power of that unassailable defense, the world would be very different today.

The Old Man looks back to the mirror to wipe the lather off. He walks from the bathroom.

FATHER

There you go.

The door closes. CAMERA FOLLOWS The Old Man as he walks to the dining room table, sits down and unfolds his morning paper, immediately going to the sports page.

FATHER

(continuing)

Son of a bitch. They traded Dulbelsky. I don't believe it.

CAMERA PANS UP TO FIND Ralphie's Mother coming to the table with breakfast.

MOTHER

What was that?

FATHER

For Christ sake. The Sox traded Dulbelsky -- the only player they got -- for Shottenhoffer -- a good, solid, one-eighty-seven hitter. He'll make a great White Sox.

MOTHER

That's nice. Ralphie!

MED. SHOT - RALPHIE

We see Ralphie placing a 'Boy's Life' inside one of his father's 'Field & Stream' magazines.

(CONTINUED)

11. CONTINUED

11.

CAMERA PANS with Ralphie from the bathroom to the kitchen. He and Randy climb up to the table for breakfast. Randy stares at his food. Randy never eats.

NARRATOR

My fevered brain seethed with the effort of trying to come up with the infinitely subtle devices necessary to implant the Red Ryder range model air rifle indelibly into my parents' consciousness without their being aware that I had planted it there.

RALPHIE

(abruptly)

Flick says he saw some grizzly bears near Pulaski's candy store the other day.

There is a sudden silence.

NARRATOR

My parents looked at me as if I had lobsters crawling out of my ears. I could tell I was in imminent danger of overplaying my hand. Casually, I switched tactics.

RALPHIE

I'll bet you'll never guess what I got you for Christmas, Dad.

FATHER

Hmmm... let's see. Is it a new furnace?

NARRATOR

My father was one of the most feared Furnace Fighters in Northern Indiana. People in Northern Indiana fought winter tooth and claw, bodily, and there was never a let-up. That's why my little brother knocked over his milk. Indiana wit is pungent and to the point.

(CONTINUED)

11. CONTINUED

11.

MOTHER

Hurry up, time for school.

FATHER

Yeah, I'm running late already.

CAMERA HOLDS on Ralphie and his mother as she clears the table and he begins to pull on his galoshes.

NARRATOR

Round One was over. Parents 1, Kids 0. I could feel the Christmas noose beginning to tighten. Maybe what happened next was inevitable. My mother, innocuously scouring a used oatmeal pot, suddenly asked out of the blue.

MOTHER

What would you like for Christmas?

NARRATOR

Horrified, I heard myself blurt it out.

RALPHIE

An official Red Ryder carbine action two-hundred shot range model air rifle!

NARRATOR

I was dead. Even before she opened her mouth, I knew what was coming.

MOTHER

Oh no. You'll shoot your eye out.

NARRATOR

It was the classic Mother BB Gun Block. That deadly phrase, many times before by hundreds of mothers was not surmountable by any means known to Kid-dom. I had really booted it.

(CONTINUED)

11. CONTINUED

11.

NARRATOR (CONT)

But such was my mania, my desire for a Red Ryder carbine that I immediately began to rebuild the dike.

RALPHIE

Heh heh... I was just kidding. Even though Flick is getting one. I guess... I guess, uh, I'd like a... some Lincoln Logs.

NARRATOR

I couldn't believe my own ears. Lincoln Logs -- she'd never buy it.

MOTHER

They're dangerous. I don't want anybody shooting his eye out.

NARRATOR

The boom had been lowered and I was under it.

We hear the SOUNDS of The Old Man being chased by a PACK OF HOUNDS. The Old Man curses as he fights them off.

FATHER (O.S.)

Getout of here, you dumb buggers!

We hear a LOUD YELP. He has obviously gotten in at least one good kick.

FATHER

(continuing;
entering)

Goddamn Olds is froze up again!

CAMERA FOLLOWS him as he marches to the sink, grabs a large pan and fills it with water and deposits it on the stove, flicking on the gas.

NARRATOR

Some men are Baptists; some are Methodists...

(CONTINUED)

11. CONTINUED

11.

NARRATOR (CONT)

...others Catholics or Jews.
My father was an Oldsmobile
man.

FATHER

Christ, that sonofabitch would
freeze up on the equator!

MOTHER

(no reproach in
her voice)
Little Pitchers...

FATHER

Ummph!

Just at that moment we hear a SOFT LITTLE PUFF OF AN
EXPLOSION. The Old Man's ears perks up.

FATHER

(continuing)
Wait!

He cocks his head to one side like a manic roadrunner.
The SOUND COMES AGAIN. A soft puff of blue smoke billows
from the furnace grate.

FATHER

(continuing; at
the top of his
voice drawn out
like a bugle
charge)
Sonofabitch clinker!!

NARRATOR

It was the Indiana war cry and
he was off down the basement
steps, knocking over Ball jars
and kicking roller skates out
of the way, bellowing.

FATHER

The son of a bitch has gone out
again! The goddamn clanky son
of a bitch!

(CONTINUED)

11. CONTINUED

11.

We hear the horrendous SOUND of The Old Man tumbling down the stairs and hitting bottom.

MOTHER

(to Ralph and
Randy)

All right, you two, out the door
in three minutes.

NARRATOR

My mother planned these tactical retreats whenever my father was about to go into combat with the iron dragon in the basement. In the heat of battle, my father wove a tapestry of obscenity that, as far as we know, is still hanging in the space over Lake Michigan.

The SOUNDS that come hurtling out of that basement would cause such loss of face to the producer of a Japanese monster movie that he would be forced to impale himself post-haste on the nearest ceremonial sword. ROARS, CLANKS, SNORTS, RATTLES, MUMBLES, GROANS, SCREAMS! Meanwhile Randy and Ralphie start to put on their overclothes.

FATHER (O.S.)

For Chrissake, open up the damper, will you? How the hell did it get turned all the way down again? God dammit!

Mother flies to the kitchen and pulls the chain marked "draft." CAMERA PANS BACK TO the cellar door and HOLDS. All is silent for a few seconds; then suddenly a great ROAR and the SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS pounding up the steps. The door flies open and The Old Man emerges from a cloud of blue smoke like Mephistopheles appearing before Faust.

FATHER

(continuing)

For Chrissake, stupid, I said
the godddamn Damper!

He turns and disappears into the blue cloud, yelling.

(CONTINUED)

11. CONTINUED

11.

FATHER

(continuing)

Call the goddamn office. Tell
'em I'm gonna be late. God
damnit!

We hear the inevitable CRASH as The Old Man hits
bottom again. Mother pushes the basement door closed
and turns to the kids. The Old Man toils on in the
stygian darkness below the house. CAMERA FOLLOWS
Mother as she moves to help Randy with his clothes.

NARRATOR

Preparing to go to school was
like getting ready for extended
deep-sea diving; long johns,
corduroy knickers, checkered
flannel lumberjack shirt, four
sweaters, fleece-lined
leatherette sheepskin, helmet,
goggles, mittens with leatherette
gauntlets and a large red star
with an Indian chief's face in
the middle.

Mother has Randy practically on his head trying to
stuff him into his snowsuit. Finally she gets him in
and stands him up. He stands with both hands extended
from his sides like a tiny scarecrow. Mother begins
to wrap an enormous scarf around his neck. We hear a
faint whimpering coming from inside Randy's suit. The
sound is totally muffled. Randy stands forlornly with
his arms sticking straight out like an abandoned semaphor.

RANDY

Um! Um! Um! Uhbum!

He mumbles fiercely.

MOTHER

What did you say?

RANDY

Ump! Um Um Ump!

He is quite desperate by now.

RALPHIE

Aw, Ma, we'll be late.

(CONTINUED)

11. CONTINUED

11.

MOTHER
Just wait, Ralph.

RANDY
Ummmph. Ump um um!

She begins the long, painful task of unwinding the scarf. Randy is quite frantic. Finally she gets the scarf off, and parts the hood, exposing Randy's face. We hear what he was saying.

RANDY
(continuing;
tearfully)
I can't put my arms down.

Mother stands back and appraises the situation. Sure enough, Randy can't put his arms down. Mother steps forward and forces Randy's arms down to his side. As soon as she steps away, however, they spring back. Randy whimpers. Mother steps forward and tries again. Up they spring again.

MOTHER
You'll put your arms down when
you get to school.

NARRATOR
In Indiana, sometimes solutions
are very practical.

She proceeds to rewind Randy against his furious protests.

NARRATOR
(continuing)
There was no question of staying
home. Cold was something that
was accepted, like air, clouds
and parents, a fact of nature,
and as such could not be used
in any fraudulent scheme to stay
out of school. My mother would
simply throw her shoulder against
the front door, pushing back the
advancing drifts and stone ice.

We see just what the Narrator is describing.

(CONTINUED)

11. CONTINUED

11.

NARRATOR

(continuing)

The wind raking the living room rug with angry fury for an instant and we would be launched...one after the other, my brother and I like astronauts into unfriendly space.

CUT TO:

12. EXT. PARKER HOUSE - DAY

12.

Outside the door. We see Randy and Ralphie leaning into the fierce wind. The door clangs shut.

NARRATOR

The door clanged shut behind us and that was it -- it was make school or die.

CUT TO:

LONG SHOT OF RALPHIE'S BLOCK

We see Ralphie's house, black smoke billowing from the drafts. The Old Man's tilt with the windmill goes on. We see Ralphie and the hapless stiff-armed Randy coming up their walkway to the street. CAMERA TAKES IN the whole block and we see the other kids on their way.

NARRATOR

Scattered out over the icy waste around us could be seen other tiny, befurred jots of wind-driven humanity, all painfully toiling toward the Warren G. Harding school miles away over the tundra. All of us were bound for Geography lessons involving the exports of Peru; reading lessons dealing with fat cats and dogs named 'Spot.'

CUT TO:

(CONTINUED)

12. CONTINUED

12.

CLOSER SHOT

Ralphie sees his friend FLICK and runs toward him. Randy struggles after, the perpetual kid brother.

RALPHIE

Hey, Flick, wait up! Wait up!

Ralphie runs up to Flick and they begin that inexplicable ritual common to schoolboys everywhere, trading punches on the arm. First one, then the other, until it obviously hurts like hell. It is all rooted, no doubt, in some dim territorial imperative stretching back over the centuries.

RALPHIE

(continuing)

Whatcha doing?

FLICK

What does it look like I'm doing, pickin' goobers?

NARRATOR

Flick was cool, even then.

13. EXT. SCHWARTZ'S HOUSE - DAY

13.

Just at this moment they pass Schwartz's house. SCHWARTZ plows down the driveway toward them. The arm ritual is repeated between Ralphie and Schwartz. The pecking order is important in Kid rituals and apparently there is order and reason behind it, indecipherable to adults, but apparently sufficient to kids.

SCHWARTZ

(to Flick)

Hey listen, smart ass, I asked my Ol' Man about sticking your tongue to metal light poles in winter, and he says it will freeze right to the pole. Just like I told you.

FLICK

Ah, baloney! What would your ol' man know about anything?

(CONTINUED)

13. CONTINUED

13.

SCHWARTZ

He knows because he once saw a guy stick his tongue to a railroad track. On a bet. And the Fire Department had to come get the guy's tongue off the track 'cause he couldn't get it off. It froze right there.

RALPHIE

I think he's right, Flick.

FLICK

Aw, jeez, you guys are real suckers for anything. My brother says that's an old wife's tale, and so does my mother.

SCHWARTZ

Yeah, well, she's an Ol' Wife all right. She oughta know!

Schwartz and Ralphie laugh. Crazy kid laughter.

FLICK

Hey, watch it, Jerk-head. Don't talk about my ma!

NARRATOR

Any reference to one's mother was like throwing down the gauntlet, no matter how vague or remote the slight. Just the mere mention of one's mother with any adjective in the dictionary, no matter how innocuous, was grounds for instant and ruinous vendetta.

RALPHIE

Aw, he didn't mean nothin', Flick

Flick bristles. The ceremony is played out.

SCHWARTZ

Yeah, you know I wouldn't say nothin' against your mother, Flick. I was just kidding.

FLICK

Yeah, well, just watch it.

14. EXT. - ALLEYWAY - DAY

14.

They continue turning the corner down an alleyway.

NARRATOR

That simple phrase, 'Yeah, well just watch it.' If only it had been understood and deployed by statesmen through the ages untold mayhem and carnage could have been averted. Imagine Chamberlain standing up at the end of the Munich Conference and glaring down at Hitler with steely eyes and muttering 'Yeah, well, just watch it!' Do you think there would have been any invasion of Poland, or Czechoslovakia or Austria? Or any World War Two? Not on your blue-striped garters.

Somehow all this is resolved in more arm punching. They start off toward school.

FLICK

Yeah, well, your Old Man is pulling your leg and you're too dumb to know it.

SCHWARTZ

All right, I dare you to try it.

FLICK

Yeah.

SCHWARTZ

Yeah

FLICK

Says who?

SCHWARTZ

Says me.

FLICK

Oh yeah?

(CONTINUED)

14. CONTINUED

14.

NARRATOR

The exact exchange and nuance of phrase in this ritual is very important. One misplaced 'Oh yeah' or 'Says who' could immediately destroy one's credibility, demolish one's argument, and subject the luckless offender to immediate and prolonged ostracism.

SCHWARTZ

I double dare ya.

FLICK

Oh...

RALPHIE

(jumping in)

Wait a minute!

CAMERA MOVES IN SLOWLY on the group as they acknowledge something O.S. A slow, ominous CHORD OF MUSIC begins to creep up, not unlike the theme music from Jaws. It grows during this sequence. CAMERA PANS from one face to another as they peer, fear-struck.

CUT TO:

THEIR POV - CLOSEUP - A WOODEN SLATTED FENCE

We can just see enough through the boards to vaguely sense a figure moving on its other side. The MUSIC oozes up ominously. CAMERA PANS the fence as the figure glides by.

CUT BACK TO:

THE THREE HAPLESS ONES

THREE QUICK CUTS - THEIR FACES

as they watch like mesmerized mice.

CUT BACK TO:

(CONTINUED)

14. CONTINUED

14.

THE FENCE

The ominous presence glides on. CAMERA TILTS DOWN SLOWLY TO a break in the fence. We see a pair of broganned feet stop. The ominous MUSIC SWELLS to a crescendo. The feet stand there planted, menacingly.

CUT TO:

OUR THREE LITTLE MICE

as they tremble, wide-eyed.

CUT BACK TO:

THE FENCE

The feet in the brogans stand for one more moment, then move off arrogantly.

CAMERA TILTS UP to see the figure disappear behind the fence. We hear a nasty, evil LAUGH tailing off in the wind.

CUT BACK TO:

THE BOYS

Relief floods their faces.

RALPHIE

Whew! That was close.

SCHWARTZ

Let's get out of here!

They bolt across the road toward school.

15. EXT. GRADE SCHOOL - LONG SHOT - WARREN G. HARDING GRADE
SCHOOL - DAY

15.

Snow covers the ground. Ice sheets cover the basketball courts. We hear a BELL RING. Kids scurry.

16. INT. SCHOOL - CLOSEUP - GROUP OF KIDS - DAY

16.

They huddle together conspiratorially, obviously passing something around.

CUT TO:

MISS SHIELDS

A fourth grade teacher in the classic mold. She moves to her desk.

The kids hurry to their desks.

MISS SHIELDS

Good morning, class.

We hear the class answer in unison, but they sound funny, like a comic take-off on a Japanese kamikaze pilot. Miss Shields looks puzzled for a brief moment, then slowly she holds her hand out, palm up, with studied, professional patience. CAMERA PANS FROM Miss Shields TO the class.

LONG SHOT - THE CLASS

Every kid in the class is wearing a set of wax teeth. We see them all grinning and giggling at her. They look like 25 demented beavers.

CUT BACK TO:

MISS SHIELDS

She wiggles her palm with subtle meaning.

CUT TO:

THE KIDS

One by one they file past, handing in their wax teeth.

(CONTINUED)

16. CONTINUED

16.

CLOSEUP - MISS SHIELDS' HAND

The wax teeth are handed over one by one. Finally CAMERA FOLLOWS one hand down as she deposits the teeth in a huge drawer, the Friday drawer, containing an incredible collection of Kid Effluvia; yo-yo's, rubber noses, pea shooters, slingshots, plastic lensless eye-glasses with false noses attached, fake mustaches, plastic water pistols shaped like Lugers, jaw-breakers both used and unused, string, a Scout knife, a small hard black rubber ball, cards with pictures of baseball players, three or four small wax bottles filled with a verminous green liquid, bottle caps, a top, five or six lurid comic books and other treasures of kid-hood.

CLOSEUP - MISS SHIELDS

She is calm, impassive.

MISS SHIELDS

All right, class, open your readers to page thirty-two. As you remember, Silas Marner was...

CAMERA PULLS BACK to reveal class, heads bent with exaggerated studiousness, opening their readers.

17. EXT. SCHOOL GROUNDS - LONG SHOT - THE KIDS - DAY

17.

Recess. In the drifted dirty snow, kids stand in little clots.

Skies are darker than in the earlier scenes. We sense a blizzard on the way. The steady BANGING of a lanyard on the flagpole in the cold north wind provides a sinister ringing tempo to the scene.

CAMERA PANS DOWN the pole TO PICK UP the kids. The conversation from the morning continues.

SCHWARTZ

Alright, I dare ya again.

FLICK

Oh yeah?

(CONTINUED)

17. CONTINUED

17.

SCHWARTZ
I double dare ya.

FLICK
Oh yeah?

SCHWARTZ
I double dog dare ya.

An audible gasp from the other kids.

NARRATOR
Now it was serious. A double
dog dare. What else was left
but a triple dare-you and finally
the coup de grace of all dares,
the sinister triple dog-dare?
Schwartz created a slight breach
of etiquette by skipping the
triple dare and going right for
the throat.

SCHWARTZ
I triple dog dare ya!

Flick flinches.

CUT TO:

EACH OF THE KIDS IN TURN

They watch the great showdown.

NARRATOR
Flick's spine stiffened. His
lips curled in a defiant sneer.
There was no going back now.

CLOSEUP - THE POLE

CLOSEUP - SCHWARTZ

triumphant.

CLOSEUP - RALPHIE

wonderment.

(CONTINUED)

17. CONTINUED

17.

CLOSEUP - FLICK

He stands a few inches from the pole, staring it down.
He turns and gives the gus one last bravado look.

CLOSEUP - SCHWARTZ

He smirks, but a little less confidently.

CLOSEUP - FLICK

FLICK

Ah, this is dumb!

He laughs a bravado little laugh, turns, and with utter disdain thrusts his tongue to full extension and plunges it forward onto the flagpole.

It sticks, freezes solid as a popsicle.

Flick mumbles in panic and tries to pull free. He doesn't try this for long. It smarts.

CLOSEUP - SCHWARTZ

His smirk turns to astonishment.

SCHWARTZ

Jeez! It really works!

Ralphie stands there open-mouthed.

CLOSEUP - THE OTHER KIDS

They stare, dumbfounded.

Flick grunts an inchoate cry for help.

Schwartz and Ralphie, now vaguely aware of impending official doom, back off.

Suddenly the BELL RINGS. Ralphie and Schwartz look at the school and then back to Flick. The BELL RINGS like a shriek out of hell. That's it. Ralphie and Schwartz are off like a shot.

(CONTINUED)

17. CONTINUED

17.

NARRATOR

In Indiana, when the school bell rang, you went. Neither sleet nor snow nor frozen tongues stayed your headlong flight to your desk. Flick's predicament was no exception.

And as the wind rises and the lanyard BANGS with a steady drumming beat, the playground is emptied except for a tiny huddled figure frozen to the flagpole.

18. INT. CLASSROOM - CLOSEUP - RALPHIE AND SCHWARTZ - DAY

18.

slide into their desks and play dumb. Over their shoulders, away across the schoolyard, we see the hapless Flick. Ralphie and Schwartz collectively wince. We now have an empty seat halfway in the back row. Miss Shields' radar begins to warm up. She knows something is wrong.

MISS SHIELDS

Where is Flick?

Conspicuous silence.

MISS SHIELDS

(continuing)

Did anyone see Flick at recess?

Conspiratorial silence.

MISS SHIELDS

(continuing)

Well?

Finally one little girl beckons to Miss Shields.

MISS SHIELDS

(continuing)

Yes, Esther Jane?

The little girl points hurriedly to the playground.

MISS SHIELDS

(continuing)

What was that?

(CONTINUED)

18. CONTINUED

18.

The little girl points again. Miss Shields looks out at the playground. She sees the figure. She walks to the window, looking closer.

MISS SHIELDS

(continuing)

Oh my God!

At this point, twenty-two children stampede toward the window, gawking out. Only two innocents remain uninterested. Ralphie and Schwartz sit unconcernedly looking nonchalantly up at the ceiling. You could never tell they were involved.

Miss Shields flies from the room.

CUT TO:

19. INT./EXT. SCHOOLROOM AND YARD - LONG SHOT - DAY

19.

LOOKING PAST the kids out to the playground. Ambulances and two fire engines are just removing Flick from the pole. We hear the steady keening of SIRENS.

Ralphie and Schwartz turn and look at one another with doom in their faces.

CUT TO:

20. INT. CLASSROOM - CLOSEUP - FLICK - DAY

20.

with bandaged tongue being led back into the classroom. He doesn't say a word, looking straight ahead as he moves to his seat and sits down. But Miss Shields looks directly at Ralphie and Schwartz. Has Flick squealed?

MISS SHIELDS

I know some of you put Flick up to this, but Flick refuses to say who. But those who did it know their blame, and I know the guilt you feel at causing this pain will be worse than any punishment you might receive.

(CONTINUED)

20. CONTINUED

20.

Ralphie and Schwartz give each other a look which says everything.

NARRATOR

Adults love to say things like that. But kids know better. We knew darn well it was always better not to get caught.

CAMERA MOVES INTO A CLOSEUP of Flick and his wounded tongue. Schwartz and Ralphie stare stonily at Miss Shields, betraying absolutely no emotion. There is not a hint of their guilt.

MISS SHIELDS

Not only did you suggest this awful thing, but even worse, you left him there all alone in the cold. Now don't you feel terrible? Don't you feel remorse for what you have done?

She pauses dramatically and subjects the entire room to her X-ray eye.

MISS SHIELDS

(continuing)

Now, that is all I am going to say about poor little Flick. Open your notebooks, boys and girls. I am going to give you an assignment.

A low, sullen mumble rolls through the classroom.

MISS SHIELDS

(continuing)

I want all of you to write a theme...

NARRATOR

A theme! A rotten theme before Christmas! There must be kids somewhere who love writing themes, but to a normal, air-breathing human kid, writing themes is a torture that ranks only with the dreaded medieval chin-breaker of Inquisitional fame. A theme!

(CONTINUED)

20. CONTINUED

20.

MISS SHIELDS

...entitled 'What I Want For Christmas.'

NARRATOR

The clouds lifted. I saw a faint gleam of light at the other end of the black cave of gloom. Here was a theme on a subject that needed talking about if ever one did! Already, a masterpiece was unfolding in my mind.

MISS SHIELDS

I want you to be particularly careful about margins. You will hand in your themes tomorrow, and I don't want to hear excuses. Now open your spelling books to page twenty-one.

DISSOLVE TO:

21. EXT. ANOTHER ALLEY - DAY

21.

Ralphie, Schwartz and the wounded warrior Flick huddle together for warmth amid the gray craggy snowbanks. In the HOWLING GALE, the TELEPHONE WIRES WHISTLE like banshees.

SCHWARTZ

Boy, did you see how it stuck?

RALPHIE

Did it hurt, Flick?

FLICK

Naw; I neber feld a think. It jus' caught me off guard.

SCHWARTZ

Boy, you sure were bawling.

FLICK

(bristling)
I never bawled!

SCHWARTZ

Aw, baloney.

RALPHIE

(ever alert)
Wait!

(CONTINUED)

21. CONTINUED

21*

Ralphie senses something. He stops and looks in the direction of the fence.

*
*

RALPHIE

Run! It's Dill!!!

But it is too late. A face appears suddenly in the gap between two boards. It is a malevolent face. It is the face of meanness personified. It is the dreaded GROVER DILL. The MUSIC SHUDDERS appropriately.

NARRATOR

Grover Dill! What a rotten name. We were trapped. There he stood between us and the alley, Grover Dill staring out at us with his yellow eyes. He had yellow eyes. So help me God, yellow eyes! His cap slunk low over his non-existent brow, resting on his ears, which flared out like toadstools. His lips curled over his green teeth in a semblance of speech.

DILL

Hey! Fat mess!

NARRATOR

I turned in a blind primal panic and started for the fence at the end of the alley. No hope. There, curling up like a venomous Cheshire cat, was Dill's fierce little toady Scut Farkas. We had had it. The lines were clearly drawn. You were either a bully, a toady, or one of the nameless rabble of victims who hid behind hedges, continually ran up alleys and ducked under porches.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

21. CONTINUED

21.*

NARRATOR

(continuing)

For some reason, Dill looked past me to Schwartz.

DILL

Hey you, come here.

SCHWARTZ

...me?

DILL

Nah, your Aunt Tilly! Ya, you. Get over here.

Obediently, hopelessly, much in the manner of a hypnotized bird approaching a snake, Schwartz goes to Dill. Dill methodically takes Schwartz's arm and twists it.

SCHWARTZ

Aw, gee, Dill, cut it out!

DILL

Say 'Uncle'.

SCHWARTZ

Uncle! Uncle! Uncle!

DILL

(sing-song)

Cry baby, cry.

NARRATOR

Dill was a running-nose type of bully. His nose was always running, even when it wasn't. I did not know one kid who was not afraid of Dill, because Dill was truly aggressive. This kind of aggression later in life is often called Talent or Drive, but to the great formless herd of kids, it just meant a lot of running, getting belted, and continually being ashamed.

(CONTINUED)

21. CONTINUED

21.*

Dill finally has twisted Schwartz down to his knees. He gives a shove and Schwartz sprawls in the alley.

DILL
Alright, who's next?

He laughs malevolently and then makes a mock Frankenstein lunge at them.

DILL
(continuing)
Ahhhhhaggghhhhhh!

The boys bolt like jack rabbits. Dill lets them go. Scut Farkas oozes down off the fence and joins Dill. They laugh after the fleeing victims.

DILL
(continuing)
You better run, you jerks.

MEDIUM SHOT

Ralph running. Dill in b.g.

NARRATOR
I was an accomplished Alley Runner who did not wear sneakers to school from choice, but to get off the mark quicker. I was well-qualified to endorse Keds Champion sneakers with:
I have outrun some of the biggest bullies of my time wearing Keds.
And I'm still here to tell the tale. It would make a great ad in Boys Life.
Many of us have grown up wearing mental Keds and still ducking behind filing cabinets, water coolers, and into convenient men's rooms when that cold sweat trickles down between the shoulderblades.
My moment of Truth was Grover Dill!
But for now, I breathed easier.

**

22. INT. RALPH'S HOUSE - DAY

22.

Ralphie heads up the stairs.

MOTHER

Would you like a glass of
milk?

RALPHIE

(flying up the
stairs two at
a time)

No. I gotta do my homework!

MOTHER

(instantly)

Ralph! Stop right there.

She moves up the stairs and places her hand on Ralph's
brow. No fever! She looks at him in puzzlement.

RALPHIE

Ma. I gotta do my homework.

He dashes up the stairs. CAMERA HOLDS on Mother.

MOTHER

No good'll come of this.

23. INT. RALPH'S ROOM - DAY

23.

Ralph races to his desk, scattering books and papers.
He sits down, takes out pen and begins writing swiftly
and frantically in his Indian Head notebook. We look
OVER HIS SHOULDER as he writes.

(CONTINUED)

23. CONTINUED

23.

NARRATOR

Rarely had the words poured from my penny pencil with such feverish fluidity. I remember to this day its glorious winged phrases and concise imagery.

RALPHIE'S VOICE

What I want for Christmas is a Red Ryder BB gun with a compass in the stock and this thing that tells time. I think everybody should have a Red Ryder BB gun. They are very good for Christmas. I don't think a football is a very good Christmas present.

NARRATOR

I was very careful about margins. I knew that when Miss Shields read my magnificent, eloquent theme that she would sympathize with my plight and make an appeal on my behalf to the Powers That Be and everything would work out. Somehow.

Ralph completes his work, reads over his Magnum Opus. As he reads, we hear swelling in the background, the magnificent melodic lines of Mozart's Andante ("Elvira Madigan" MUSIC). Finally Ralph, with a sign of satisfaction, slaps his notebook closed. He leans back in his chair. His fantasy sweeps over him.

CAMERA MOVES IN TO his face. Again we see Ralph's thoughts projected.

24. EXT. HOUSE - DAY

24.

Miss Shields is coming up the front walk, but this is a different Miss Shields than the rather nondescript and mousy teacher. She now strides up the front walk with great presence, dignity and authority. She rings the bell. Door is opened by Mother, who draws back in surprise.

(CONTINUED)

24. CONTINUED

24.

MISS SHIELDS

Mrs. Parker, I am not here on a social call. I am here as part of my duties as a teacher.

25. INT. HOUSE - DAY

25.

Mother ushers Miss Shields into the house, listens respectfully as Miss Shields, now seated on sofa, speaks.

MISS SHIELDS

(continuing)

I understand you have expressed doubts about Ralph, your extraordinary son, as to whether or not he should be the owner of a Red Ryder BB gun. He has convinced me beyond a doubt through his magnificent and eloquent theme that it is absolutely necessary that Ralph be given a Red Ryder BB gun, for the protection of your family. Ordinarily, I would not make such a recommendation, but in the case of Ralph, I feel certain that he will use his Red Ryder BB gun with his customary skill and responsibility. If you have any questions about what I have just said, please write them in a theme of one hundred words or less for Ralph to deliver to me at school. I will grade it and return it by next Friday.

MOTHER

Thank you, Miss Shields, we will follow your instructions to the letter. We are so fortunate in having Ralph as our son!

MISS SHIELDS

I'm certainly glad that you realize how lucky you are.

(CONTINUED)

25. CONTINUED

25.

MISS SHIELDS (CONT)

Ralph is a magnificent boy, and he needs a Red Ryder BB gun, especially now that wild bears have been reported in the vicinity of Pulaski's candy store.

Mother thanks Miss Shields fervently.

Father, in the background, nods in solemn approval and agreement that they are indeed fortunate to be the parents of the truly great human being -- Ralph.

DISSOLVE TO:

Ralphie is lost in his reverie. He smiles vacantly, as he gets up and wanders aimlessly across the room and flops down on his bed amid a pile of comic books. He stares at the ceiling.

NARRATOR

Captain Ahab and his crazy thing about that white whale had nothing on me. I wanted that BB gun so bad it was making my stomach hurt.

Ralph groans.

RALPH

Ohhh...

He flops over on his stomach and flings one of his comic books at the wall next to him. He stares at it blankly. Its lurid cover reads:

FURTHER ADVENTURES OF FLASH GORDON ON THE PLANET MONGO.

The cover shows a scene of Flash Gordon, his golden hair gleaming, facing his evil arch-enemy Ming The Merciless. Ralph stares at the cover blankly for a few moments.

26. EXT. PLANET MONGO

26.

The scene DISSOLVES and we are in what appears to be the futuristic, dank atmosphere of an alien planet. MING THE MERCILESS fills the screen. He appears to be eighteen feet tall, dressed in jade-green robes with sinister gold cabalistic symbols flashing in the unnatural light, his eyes glittering with evil, his Fu Manchu mustache adding to the horror, his yellow parchment skin ageless.

(CONTINUED)

26. CONTINUED

26.

MING

At last, Flash Gordon, I have
you at my mercy.

He cackles with fiendish laughter.

CAMERA PULLS BACK and we see Flash tied with huge ropes
hand and foot to a strangely sinister tree trunk that
appears to have snakeskin instead of bark. MING snaps
his golden bullwhip in the air viciously. Behind him
we see the woven basket of a curiously futuristic
balloon. The balloon has sulphurous lidded cat's
eyes painted on it.

MING

There is no hope for you,
Flash Gordon. I will now
proceed to destroy the planet
Earth with my Turbo-Xenon
Space Balloon, with its
deadly Z-Gamma Rays.

FLASH

Ming, we earthlings will
live forever. You...

Ming snaps his whip imperiously.

MING

In moments, that Cobra Tree will
awaken and devour you.

There is a QUICK CUT and we see, in the dank jungle
undergrowth, Ralph's eyes peering out at this awful
pageant. His eyes are wide with wonder, yet there
is an air of grim determination about him.

FLASH

If my faithful companion Ralph
were...

His voice is cut off by the HIGH, SCREAMING LAUGHTER
of Ming.

MING

Enough, stupid Earthling!
It is time now to destroy
your foolish planet

(CONTINUED)

26. CONTINUED

26.

He leaps into the balloon, which begins to rise, his LAUGHTER echoing maniacally and filling the SOUND track.

Ralph leaps to his feet and lurches out of the undergrowth. He is carrying his Red Ryder range-model BB gun. The balloon has ascended high overhead.

FLASH GORDON

(his face registering
astonished relief)

Ralph! You're alive! You
escaped the Space Crocodiles!

RALPH

(grim and determined)

Yes, Flash. Now it's time
to act!

Ralph stands heroically and raises his BB gun. It glows magically. He sights along its barrel. In the distance we see Ming's evil balloon high in the yellow sky of the planet MONGO. The Maniacal cacklings of Ming are heard as he shrieks.

MING

Death to Earth! Death to Earth!

Ralph pulls the trigger of his Red Ryder BB gun.

RALPH

(hissing through his teeth)

Take that, Ming The Merciless.

A projectile streaks upward. We hear Ming's SCREAMING shriek.

MING

Oh no, NO!

His balloon makes an obscene farting noise, careening off crazily, growing smaller and smaller by the instant.

FLASH

(his voice quivering
with reverent emotion)

It's the end of Ming The Merciless.
You have done it, Ralph. You have
saved all Earthlings. You have
saved our planet.

(CONTINUED)

26. CONTINUED

26.

RALPH

(smiling modestly)

It was nothing, Flash. After all, I had my trusty Red Ryder range-model BB gun, and nothing can stand up to this baby.

FLASH

(tears of joy streaming down his cheeks)

Ralphie, all Earthlings will be forever in your debt.

RALPH

(modestly)

I know. Here, I'll untie you.

FLASH

You know, Ralph, sometimes I'd like to meet that Red Ryder. He and I are in the same business, fighting Evil everywhere and standing for Truth and Justice.

RALPHIE

in reality. He smiles in triumph.

Suddenly, Ralphie hears a voluminous RACKET. He runs to the window and looks out. We see:

27. EXT. HOUSE - DUSK

27.

The Old Man is driving the Olds up the driveway. He is pursued by at least a dozen flop-eared hound dogs, BARKING, YAPPING, HOWLING and leaping.

NARRATOR

The Taylors, a quiet family who have lived next door to us for years, had moved out and without warning the Bumpuses had flooded in. In an instant, the entire neighborhood changed. There were thousands of Bumpuses, and they all moved in.

(CONTINUED)

27. CONTINUED

27.

NARRATOR (CONT)

Overnight what had been a nondescript bungalow, became a battered hinge-sprung sagging hillbilly shack.

RALPHIE'S POV - LONG SHOT - THE BUMPUS HOUSE

The house is surrounded by a thick swamp of junk: old truck tires, rusty pitchforks, busted chicken crates, an old bathtub, at least 57 ancient bedsprings, eight or nine horse collars, chicken wire, baling wire, barbed wire, corncobs, an ironing board and a lot of big tall water boilers with pipes sticking out. The Old Man is trying to get out of the car.

NARRATOR

And then there were the dogs, they had at least seven hundred and forty-five dogs! Now our neighborhood had always had dogs walking around, ordinary dogs with names like Zero or Prince, The Bumpus hounds, on the other hand, were just a great churning mass of tails and tongues and flea-bitten bodies. You could almost see the smell -- and they loved my father. They ignored every other human being on earth but my Old Man. Every time he set foot outside the whole tidal wave of heaving flanks and bloodshot eyes would descend on him. The trouble was that half of them were trying to lick his face and the other half were trying to take off his leg.

The Old Man is fighting for his life, and screaming at the top of his lungs. We can't quite make out what he's saying, but it sounds like:

FATHER

I won! I won!

(CONTINUED)

27. CONTINUED

27.

He's kicking at the dogs and backing up, holding something aloft.

28. INT. - HOUSE - NIGHT

28.

Ralphie turns and dashes downstairs.

NARRATOR

The depression days were the golden age of the newspaper contest and The Old Man was a giant jackpot puzzle contest junkie. There was an endless parade of 'Name the Presidents,' 'Mystery Movie Stars,' 'Famous Figures in History,' and 'How many mistakes are in this Picture,' all offering fifty thousand dollar giant jackpots. For the cost of a two-cent newspaper, countless millions struggled nightly to hit the jackpot. Every evening the Chicago American was spread out on the dining room table. Paste pot handy, scissors and ruler, pen and ink at the ready, The Old Man clipped and glued, struggled and guessed -- and now the payoff had come!

Ralphie arrives downstairs as The Old Man lunges through the front door, closing it on the ears of one of the most insistent of the SNARLING pack. The dog HOWLS in the background as The Old Man leaps about the living room waving a telegram over his head.

FATHER

I won! I won! I won!

MOTHER

What! What! What is it?

FATHER

A major prize. A major prize.
I won! I won! Look!

He hands Mother the telegram. The kids crowd around. We see the telegram. It reads:

(CONTINUED)

28. CONTINUED

28.

INSERT - TELEGRAM

Congratulations. You have won a major award in our fifty thousand dollar "Great Heroes From The World of Sports" contest. It will arrive by special messenger delivered to your address. You are a winner. Congratulations!

BACK TO SCENE

The Old Man is now dancing a jig around the room. The kids are whooping, the dog, whose ears are in the door, is HOWLING.

FATHER

Tonight, it's coming tonight.
Tonight! Tonight! Tonight!
Hot dam, tonight!

MOTHER

What do you mean?

FATHER

Tonight! It's coming tonight.
I called Ernie McClosky down
at the freight office. It's
there! He's gonna send it
out tonight. The telegram
was late, the prize is already
there.

The old man continues his jig.

FATHER

(continuing)

Tonight! Tonight! Tonight!

He dances over to the door and releases the poor dog's ear. He sticks his leg out the front door and holds it there comically.

FATHER

(continuing)

Tonight! Tonight! Take a
bite, boys, take a bite. It's
on me. I don't care. Go
ahead!

(CONTINUED)

28. CONTINUED

28.

We hear a dog YELP. The Old Man pulls the leg in quickly and slams the door. He claps his hands together, suddenly serious.

FATHER

(continuing)

It'll probably be one of them Spanish adobe houses in Coral Gables, Florida. That's one of their big items. Or it could be a bowling alley. Guy down in Terre Haute won a bowling alley.

MOTHER

But how could they deliver a bowling alley tonight.

The Old Man is stumped for a minute.

FATHER

Well, they could deliver the deed, for Chrissake. I mean, I didn't think they were gonna deliver the damned bowling alley.

He laughs. Nothing is going to spoil his expansiveness.

FATHER

(continuing)

Well, it'll be a while!
Let's eat! I'm starving.
Gettin' rich is hard work.

CAMERA DWELLS on Ralphie and Randy's awestruck faces.

29. INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

29.

Ralph and Randy sit at table, Mother scurries from stove to table, back to stove. Father reads the Chicago Tribune sports page. Randy sits with his feet twined around the legs of his chair, poking listlessly at his food. He begins to plow the surface of his mashed potatoes with a fork. The Old Man glances at his watch impatiently from time to time.

MOTHER

(automatically)

Randy, eat your food, don't play with it.

(CONTINUED)

29. CONTINUED

29.

RANDY

(whining)

Aww...gee...awwwww.

NARRATOR

Every family has a Kid Who Won't Eat. In our case, it was my brother.

MOTHER

Starving people would be glad to have that. Now, you eat.

RANDY

Awww....

Randy begins to shape mashed potatoes into the configuration of a football.

FATHER

(absently, through
a mouthful of
meatloaf)

Do what your mother tells you.
Pass the red cabbage, huh?

RANDY

Awwwww....

FATHER

I'm gonna give you something to cry about in one minute if you don't quit playing with your food. Now you stop fooling around and eat that, or you're gonna be sorry!

Mother serves Father red cabbage and removes pan to stove, returning to take her seat.

RALPHIE

(just as Mother
sits)

Where's the red cabbage? I didn't get any.

(CONTINUED)

29. CONTINUED

29.

Patiently, Mother rises and goes to stove.

NARRATOR

You could see that my mother
had not had a hot meal in
about fifteen years.

RANDY

(in a whining
sing-song)

Meatloaf, smetloaf, double
beetloaf....

Randy fidgets, stirs milk with finger, pushes food
from one side of plate to the other, now arranging
red cabbage in an artistic circle around his cold,
congealing slice of meatloaf.

FATHER

Knock it off. Eat.

NARRATOR

Every meal went the same way.
Once in a while, my father
would blow his stack.
'Dammit,' he'd yell, 'I'll
make the damn kid eat! Where's
my screwdriver? Where's the
plumber's helper?' He'd
just pry his mouth open and
stuff it in.

Mother eats hurriedly, pausing to wipe up Randy's
spilled milk with her paper napkin.

NARRATOR

(continuing)

My mother, though, was more
subtle.

Mother looks at Randy. Her face lights up with an
idea.

MOTHER

Randy? How do the little
piggies go?

(CONTINUED)

29.

CONTINUED:

29.

RANDY

(tentatively)

Oink?

NARRATOR

My brother was deep in his Three Little Pigs bag. He had a little Golden Book, and it was his favorite heavy reading material.

MOTHER

That's right. Oink oink. Nice little piggies. How do the piggies eat? There's your trough. Show me how the piggies eat.

Randy waits for more coaxing.

MOTHER

(continuing)

Be a good boy. Show us how the piggies eat.

Suddenly, Randy bends forward, shoves face into plate, begins to gobble food frantically, "oinking" all the while. Mother smiles as plate is emptied.

FATHER

(behind newspaper)

Jesus.

His tone is one of total disgust.

MOTHER

(beaming)

Nice piggy, good little piggy.

Scene ends with Randy smiling and oinking over his clean plate, his face looking like a half-finished Mount Rushmore.

Suddenly, the DOORBELL RINGS. The family freezes. After a long pause The Old Man in a hushed whisper:

FATHER

It's here.

(CONTINUED)

29. CONTINUED

29.

They sit unable to move. The BELL RINGS incessantly.

NARRATOR

What was here? Fifty thousand
dollars? Fame? A trip to the
moon? The end of the rainbow?

As one, they all dash to the front door.

30. INT./EXT. THE HOUSE - NIGHT

30.

The door is flung open, a MAN stands in the doorway,
looking down at a bill of lading.

FREIGHT MAN

Frank Parker?

FATHER

Yeah.

FREIGHT MAN

Sign here.

The Old Man grabs the pad and scribbles frantically.

FREIGHT MAN

(continuing)

Okay, haul it in!

The family stands open-mouthed as two burly movers
carry in a waist high cardboard carton. Not a word
is said as Mother directs them to the kitchen where
the box is deposited gently on the kitchen floor. As
the men depart an air of foreboding surrounds the
mysterious object. Then The Old Man dives in.

NARRATOR

The Old Man, his face flushed
with excitement, fumbled in
supercharged haste to lay
bare his hard won symbol of
victory.

(CONTINUED)

30.

CONTINUED

30.

A billowing mushroom cloud of excelsior explodes into the air. The Old Man literally plunges into the carton disappearing for a long moment. He emerges holding aloft the prize.

NARRATOR

(continuing)

Before us, in the heavy, fragrant, cabbage-scented kitchen stood a life-size lady's leg -- in true blushing pink flesh tones and wearing a modish black patent leather pump with spiked heel. When I say life-size I am referring to a rather large lady who obviously had dined well and matured nicely. For an instant we thought that we had received in the mail the work of an artist of the type that was very active at that period -- the trunk murderer. We stood silent and in awe at the sheer shimmering unexpected beauty of the 'Major Award.'

Mother is the first to recover.

MOTHER

What is it?

FATHER

(incisively)

A -- leg!

There is a long pause.

MOTHER

But...what is it?

FATHER

(an edge to his voice)

Well it's a leg -- like a statue.

(CONTINUED)

30. CONTINUED

30.

MOTHER

A statue?

NARRATOR

Our family had never owned a statue. A statue was always considered to be a lady wearing a wreath and concrete robes, holding a torch in one hand and a book in the other.

FATHER

Yeah, a statue!

RALPHIE & RANDY

Whoopee a statue! We won a statue!

NARRATOR

My mother was trying to insinuate herself between us and 'the statue'.

MOTHER

Isn't it time for bed?

Suddenly The Old Man stands up like he's received an electric shock.

FATHER

Holy smokes!

They all fall silent.

FATHER

(continuing)

Do you know what that is?

Silence.

FATHER

(continuing)

Holy smokes would you look at that! I don't believe it.

MOTHER

What?

(CONTINUED)

30. CONTINUED

30.

FATHER

It's a lamp!

NARRATOR

It was indeed a lamp. A master stroke of lighttoliers art. It was without question, the most magnificent lamp that we had ever seen.

FATHER

Aha, here's the shade!

In an instant The Old Man has screwed it atop the fulsome thigh and there it stands, a full four feet high.

FATHER

(continuing)

My God ain't that great.

NARRATOR

The Old Man's eyes boggled behind his Harold Lloyd glasses. He was almost overcome by art!

FATHER

What a great lamp.

MOTHER

Oh I don't know.

FATHER

What a great lamp! Wow this is exactly what we need for the front window.

He sweeps up the plastic trophy and rushes into the living room.

FATHER

(continuing)

Get the extension cord from the toaster.

(CONTINUED)

30. CONTINUED

30.

We see The Old Man plunge into a jungle of extension cords and 4-way plugs, wires heading in every direction. Ralphie rushes in with the extension cord. The Old Man disappears behind the couch. Much heavy breathing and cursing emerges.

NARRATOR

The snap of a few sparks, a quick whiff of ozone and the lamp blazed forth in unparalleled glory. From ankle to thigh the translucent flesh radiated a vibrant, sensual, luminous, orange/pinkish nimbus of pagan fire. All it needed was tom-toms and maybe a bone or two.

The Old Man backs away in admiration. The leg lamp is ridiculous. But The Old Man is in his glory.

FATHER

Hey wait! I want to see it from the outside.

31. INT/EXT. THE HOUSE AND STREET - NIGHT

31.

The Old Man rushes out into the darkness, across the porch. The Bumpus dogs are startled and caught off guard. We look out the window over Ralphie's shoulder. A crowd has gathered around The Old Man.

FATHER

Move it a little to the left.

Mother reluctantly complies.

FATHER

(continuing)

Okay!

32. EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

32.

The Old Man moves further across the road. He pretends to be a casual observer walking down the street.

33. EXT./INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

33.

Mother and the kids stare out.

FATHER

That's got it. You oughta see it, from out here!

NARRATOR

The entire neighborhood was turned on. It could be seen up and down Cleveland Street, the symbol of The Old Man's victory! My mother was truly on the horns of a dilemma.

MOTHER

Well uh look at the time. Isn't it nearly time for somebody's favorite program.

NARRATOR

She was right. Only one thing in the world could have dragged us away from the soft glow of electric sex gleaming in the window. Somebody looks after mothers.

Ralph and Randy race across to the radio and snap it ON. It HUMS TO LIFE. In the background we see The Old Man re-enter the house.

NARRATOR

(continuing)

Every day at 6:45, when I was a kid, I'd drop anything I was doing, no matter what it was, and tear like a blue streak through the alleys, over fences, under porches, to get home to our Crosley Notre Dame Cathedral model radio.

RADIO

Who's that little chatterbox...?
The one with curly auburn locks...
Who do I see....?
It's Little Orphan Annie.

(CONTINUED)

33. CONTINUED

33.

NARRATOR

Ah, they don't write tunes like that any more. There was one particularly brilliant line that dealt with Sandy, Little Orphan Annie's airedale sidekick. Who can forget it?

RADIO

Arf goes Sandy.

NARRATOR

Little Orphan Annie lived in this great place called Tompkins Corners. There were people called Joe Corntassle and Uncle.

In the background we see Mother casually rise, walk over to the window and draw the blinds and snap off the leg lamp. Father pretends not to notice.

CLOSEUP - RALPH

as he sits, enraptured, before the radio.

NARRATOR

She also had this friend named Punjab, who whenever she was really in a tight spot would just show up and cut everybody's head off. I figured that if there was anything a kid of nine needed it was somebody named Punjab. Especially in our neighborhood. He wore a towel around his head.

CLOSEUP - ORNATE FRONT OF RADIO

NARRATOR

Immediately after the nightly adventure, which usually took place near the headwaters of the dreaded Orinoco, on would come a guy named Pierre Andre, the definitive radio announcer.

(CONTINUED)

33.

CONTINUED

33.

RADIO (V.O)

Fellas and gals. Get set for a meeting of the Little Orphan Annie Secret Circle!

In the background we see The Old Man, his casualness matching Mother's. He draws open the drapes and stands pretending to stare out at the street.

FATHER

Looks like snow! Umph, kinda dark in here.

He snaps on the lamp. Mother pretends to be unconcerned.

RADIO (V.O.)

Okay, kids. Time to get out your secret decoder pin. Time for another secret message direct from Little Orphan Annie to members of the Little Orphan Annie Secret Circle.

Ralph slumps.

NARRATOR

I got no decoder pin. A member of an Out Group at the age of nine. And the worst kind of an Out Group. I lived in a non-Ovaltine-drinking neighborhood.

RADIO (V.O.)

All right. Set your pins to B-7. Seven... twenty-two... nineteen... eight... forty-nine... Thirteen... three!... twenty-two... one... four... nineteen.

NARRATOR

Pierre Andre could get more out of just numbers than Orson Welles was able to squeeze out of King Lear.

(CONTINUED)

33.

CONTINUED

33.

We see Mother rise and amble toward the window. She stops to pick a new magazine.

MOTHER

You're right about that snow, I think. Brr, it's chilly. I feel a draft.

She snaps the drapes closed. The Old Man feigns indifference.

NARRATOR

The stage was set. This slowly evolving ballet of the lamp was to continue for days gathering momentum night after night. But for the moment, I was oblivious to all but Orphan Annie.

RADIO (V.O.)

Fourteen... nine... thirty-two. Okay, fellas and gals, over and out.

Ralph shows disinterest. The show is over. Ralph also looks vaguely troubled.

NARRATOR

Then -- silence. The show was over and you had a sinister feeling that out there in the darkness all over the country there were millions of kids -- decoding. Somewhere kids were getting the real truth from Orphan Annie. The message. And I had no pin. Yet! Three weeks ago I had corralled the necessary Ovaltine tin and mailed away for my decoder pin. Day after day, eon after eon, I waited. Waiting for three weeks for something to come in the mail to a kid is

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

33. CONTINUED

33.

NARRATOR

(continuing)

like being asked to build the pyramids singlehanded, using the #3 Erector set, the one without the motor. Anyway, I was skunked for another day.

We FADE OUT on the scene as The Old Man makes yet another move on the drapes.

FADE IN:

34. INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

34.

Ralph, Schwartz, Flick, Miss Shields, Extras.

Children file past Miss Shields' desk; each carefully places their theme paper on it. Ralph adds his to the pile with a little flourish of implied victory.

NARRATOR

I had done it. There could be no doubt that this theme would absolutely overwhelm Miss Shields. Not only was the Red Ryder 200-shot carbine air rifle irrevocably mine, but I began to envisage that Miss Shields, in her ecstasy, would excuse me from theme writing for the rest of my school days, or at least until high school... such was the clarity and power of my prose that it seemed ridiculous to ask me to demonstrate it further.

CAMERA MOVES SLOWLY IN TO Ralphie's face as he begins to fantasize.

35. INT. SCHOOL - MISS SHIELDS IN RALPH'S FANTASY - DAY

35.

We see Miss Shields grading papers grumpily. She throws one one down in disgust and scribbles a large "F" on it. She picks up another and gives it the same treatment, and another and yet another. She puts her hand to her forehead in despair for a moment, then she plunges in again.

She begins reading Ralphie's theme. Her face brightens. Her mouth flies open. She reads on. She utters an exclamation of joy and clasps the theme to her bosom, silent movie style.

She begins reading again, barely able to contain herself. With every sentence, she exclaims in ecstasy. Finally, she can contain herself no more. She leaps to her feet, throwing the theme into the air, and races to the blackboard. She writes Ralphie's name on the board in huge letters and follows this with:

RALPHIE A+++++

A huge "A"; then she begins writing plusses after the A. She writes plusses until she runs out of board, then continues writing them off the board and around the walls.

CAMERA PANS OFF Miss Shields TO Ralphie, where we see him standing modestly, acknowledging the thunderous ovation of his adoring classmates. We HOLD on this for a long moment, then...

DISSOLVE BACK TO:

RALPHIE AND REALITY

MISS SHIELDS

Did you want something, Ralph?

RALPHIE

(coming to)

What? Oh, no, not now. Uh

...just turning in my theme.

Ralphie backs out of the room grinning sheepishly at Miss Shields. Miss Shields looks after him quizzically.

36. EXT. STEEL MILL - DAY

36*

We are holding on the steel mill for a long moment then suddenly in the foreground we see some figures blur by. It is Ralphie, Flick and Schwartz. The frame is empty for a moment, until Grover Dill and Scut Farkas race past in hot pursuit, another empty moment, then Randy comes waddling by, arms still stuck out like a scarecrow.

OMIT - PAGES 59, 60, 61 & 62.***

*

35. CONTINUED

35.

NARRATOR

Such was the stuff of Red Ryder Mania. I took off to catch up with Schwartz and Flick. Now that my own Christmas booty was assured, I could turn my attention to the family gifts, and that meant, of course, the ever-beckoning treasures of Woolworth's.

36. EXT. ALLEYWAY - DAY

36.

Ralph, Schwartz, Flick, Randy, Grover Dill.

We see the boys heading down the street. Randy, whining, trails along about fifty yards behind, his galoshes open, wiping his nose on his sleeve.

RANDY

Wait up! Come on, you guys.
Awww... I'm gonna tell Ma.
Wait up!

Ralph and the others ignore him, moving in a sort of purposeless ramble, slowly working their way home, kicking at cans; Schwartz hurls a rock languidly at a telephone pole insulator, not even bothering to turn and see if it hits. Obviously, they do this every day.

They are passing before a wooden fence. The old familiar MUSIC creeps up, very faintly. Ralph drags a stick across the pickets, making a rasping sound.

CAMERA PANS DOWN the fence. We see the familiar brogans matching Ralphie's stride-for-stride. The boys are oblivious to the menace. Such unwariness does not go unpunished in the jungles of boyhood.

CAMERA CUTS BACK AND FORTH from the boys to the presence stalking them on the other side of the fence.

(CONTINUED)

36. CONTINUED

36.

Their aimless wanderings take them into an alley, at the end of which is a fence they must scale to continue on their way. As they near the cul-de-sac, the MUSIC RISES. At the last minute, Ralphie senses something. He stops and looks in the direction of the fence.

RALPHIE

Run! It's Dill!!!

But it is too late. A face appears suddenly in the gap between two boards. It is a malevolent face. It is the face of meanness personified. It is the dreaded GROVER DILL. The MUSIC SHUDDERS appropriately.

NARRATOR

Grover Dill! What a rotten name. We were trapped. There he stood between us and the alley, Grover Dill staring out at us with his yellow eyes. He had yellow eyes. So help me God, yellow eyes! His cap slunk low over his non-existent brow, resting on his ears, which flared out like toadstools. His lips curled over his green teeth in a semblance of speech.

DILL

Hey! Fat mess!

NARRATOR

I turned in a blind primal panic and started for the fence at the end of the alley. No hope. There, curling up like a venomous Cheshire cat, was Dill's fierce little toady Scut Farkas. We had had it. The lines were clearly drawn. You were either a bully, a toady, or one of the nameless rabble of victims who hid behind hedges, continually ran up alleys and ducked under porches.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

NARRATOR

(continuing)

For some reason, Dill looked past me to Schwartz.

DILL

Hey you, come here.

SCHWARTZ

...me?

DILL

Nah, your Aunt Tilly! Ya, you. Get over here.

Obediently, hopelessly, much in the manner of a hypnotized bird approaching a snake, Schwartz goes to Dill. Dill methodically takes Schwartz's arm and twists it.

SCHWARTZ

Aw, gee, Dill, cut it out!

DILL

Say 'Uncle'.

SCHWARTZ

Uncle! Uncle! Uncle!

DILL

(sing-song)

Cry baby, cry.

NARRATOR

Dill was a running-nose type of bully. His nose was always running, even when it wasn't. I did not know one kid who was not afraid of Dill, because Dill was truly aggressive. This kind of aggression later in life is often called Talent or Drive, but to the great formless herd of kids, it just meant a lot of running, getting belted, and continually being ashamed.

(CONTINUED)

36. CONTINUED

36.

Dill finally has twisted Schwartz down to his knees. He gives a shove and Schwartz sprawls in the alley.

DILL
Alright, who's next?

He laughs malevolently and then makes a mock Frankenstein lunge at them.

DILL
(continuing)
Ahhhhhagggghhhhhh!

The boys bolt like jack rabbits. Dill lets them go. Scut Farkas oozes down off the fence and joins Dill. They laugh after the fleeing victims.

DILL
(continuing)
You better run, you jerks.

MEDIUM SHOT

Ralph running. Dill in b.g.

NARRATOR
I was an accomplished Alley Runner who did not wear sneakers to school from choice, but to get off the mark quicker. I was well-qualified to endorse Keds Champion sneakers with:
I have outrun some of the biggest bullies of my time wearing Keds. And I'm still here to tell the tale. It would make a great ad in Boys Life.
Many of us have grown up wearing mental Keds and still ducking behind filing cabinets, water coolers, and into convenient men's rooms when that cold sweat trickles down between the shoulderblades. My moment of Truth was Grover Dill! But for now, I breathed easier.

OMIT - PAGES 59, 60, 61 & 62.

37. INT. HALLWAY OF HOUSE - FAMILY - NIGHT

37. *

Ralph, Randy and The Old Man stand waiting impatiently in the hallway.

FATHER

If we don't hurry, all the
good trees will be gone!

Mother comes racing down the stairs.

MOTHER

I'm coming, I'm coming.
Goodness gracious!

She moves to the window and snaps out the leg lamp.

MOTHER

(continuing)
Don't want to waste
electricity.

38. EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

38.

The Old Man gives her a look but lets it pass. They all bundle their way out the door and pile into the Olds.

NARRATOR

It was one of those rare nights in Hohman when the air was crisp and clean and so cold that the Bumpus dogs wouldn't even come out from under the Bumpus garage to chase my old man. And we were off on one of the great adventures of the year -- selecting the Christmas tree -- and then a ride around town to see the Yuletide splendor.

39. EXT. CHRISTMAS TREE LOT - FAMILY, CHRISTMAS TREE MAN - NIGHT

39.

Mother, Father, Ralph, and Randy walk around a frozen vacant lot, looking at Christmas trees.

(CONTINUED)

39. CONTINUED

39.

NARRATOR

Buying the Christmas tree
was always only after long
and soul-searching discussion.

MOTHER

There's a bare spot on the
back.

CHRISTMAS TREE MAN

It'll fluff out, lady, when it
gets hot.

MOTHER

(doubtfully)

I don't know...

FATHER

Is this the kind the needles
fall out?

CHRISTMAS TREE MAN

Nah, that's them balsams.

MOTHER

Oh.

The Christmas tree is finally chosen. After a great deal of difficulty, it is securely lashed to the back of the car, sticking out of the trunk and tied to the bumpers with lengths of grimy, knotted rope.

40. EXT. HOHMAN STREETS - FAMILY - NIGHT

40.

We see the family in the car, looking at the decorations. Christmas lights festoon houses, plastic Santas smile from the tops of garages, plastic wreaths of holly hang from the lamp posts surrounding smiling Santa faces. A choir of Christmas carollers accompanies this tableau.

We see a Nativity group on a front lawn. Joseph and Mary kneel in the straw, adoring the Infant, watched by three plastic sheep, a plastic cow, and Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer, his nose a bright red bulb.

(CONTINUED)

40. CONTINUED

40.

Eight more plastic reindeer stand on the roof of the cardboard shed.

NARRATOR

Somehow, religion has a tendency to get mixed up with Walt Disney.

41. INT. CAR - NIGHT

41.

A sound like "G-DUNK, G-DUNK, G-DUNK" is heard. The car lurches.

FATHER

Dammit!

MOTHER

What is it?

FATHER

We got a damn flat!

Father pulls over, leaps from the car. The sound of BANGING TOOLS AND STEADY CURSING can be heard from the back of the car.

NARRATOR

Actually, my father loved it. He always saw himself in the pits at the Indianapolis Speedway.

Father passes side window, rolling spare tire, jack under his arm.

MOTHER

(to Ralph)

Why don't you go help Daddy?

NARRATOR

It was the first time it had been suggested I go help my father with anything.

Ralph gets out of the car. CAMERA DOLLIES IN. The car is up on the shoulder, and every time a tractor-trailer booms past, a spray of icy slush slops over.

(CONTINUED)

41. CONTINUED

41.

The Old Man as he struggles with the jack. On the other side of the car, away from the road, is a deep weedy ravine, weed tops poking out of the drifted snow. In the dark and slushy night, The Old Man struggles with his worn and patched spare tire.

NARRATOR

(continuing)

My Old Man's spare tires were actually only tires in the academic sense. They were round; they had once been made of rubber, but by the time they were in the dark bullpen of the car's trunk to be used as spares. There was so little tread on them that The Old Man used to say you could read the Want Ads of the Tribune right through them.

The Old Man busily fits jack, jacks up car, begins to remove wheel bolts with wrench. Ralph watches.

FATHER

(noticing Ralph)

What the hell are you doing?

RALPH

Mom said I should help.

FATHER

Oh. Yeh. Listen, hold this hubcap. I'm gonna put the bolts in it. Fer Chrissake, don't move it!

The Old Man struggles with the tire. Ralph stands next to him, holding the hubcap. Cars whiz by, throwing slush from under their tires. A giant semi roars past, throwing up such a plume of slush and icy, filthy water that Ralph flinches.

FATHER

(continuing)

Stand still, dammit! Okay, now, gimme the bolts.

(CONTINUED)

41. CONTINUED

41.

The Old Man reaches up, and accidentally hits the hub-cap with his hand. The PICTURE slows down INTO SLOW MOTION.

NARRATOR

For one brief moment, I saw all the bolts silhouetted against the lights of the traffic. And then they were gone, into the snowbank, under the car, down the ravine into the abyss.

CLOSEUP - RALPH - IN SLOW MOTION

CAMERA ZOOMS IN on Ralphie's face, just as he is about to make an exclamation. CAMERA ZOOMS PAST his mouth just as he is forming The Word. Just at that moment, a TRUCK ROARS by and drowns out the sound. We do not hear the word or see it spoken, but it is evident that Ralph has said The Word.

NARRATOR

It was The Word. I don't know why I said it. It just came out.

CLOSEUP - FATHER

His face is frozen in astonishment. There is a long pause.

FATHER

(ominously)
What did you say?

RALPH

Ah... er...uh...

FATHER

(grimly)
That's what I thought you said.

A long pause, both figures are caught in the glare of the oncoming traffic.

(CONTINUED)

41. CONTINUED

41.

FATHER

(continuing)

Here. Hold the flashlight.

He crawls around in the snow, looking for the lost bolts, muttering constantly. After an enormous struggle, he manages to retrieve three of them, and replaces the bolts, puts on the hubcap, returns the jack to the trunk after a brief tussle with the lashed down Christmas tree. Ralph watches dumbly.

FATHER

(continuing)

Okay. Get in the car.

42. INT. CAR - NIGHT

42.

Father, Mother, Ralph, Randy.

FATHER

Do you know what your son just said?

NARRATOR

Mother looked puzzled. Randy, in the back seat, perked up and leaned forward attentively. He knew I was suddenly in trouble, and he loved it. If he had a tail, it would have been wagging.

FATHER

(leaning closer to
Mother)

Your son said...

Whispers. Mother sits bolt upright in shock.

MOTHER

Ohhh!

She turns to glare at Ralph. Randy snickers. They ride home silently, Ralph with the air of someone being taken to the gallows.

43. INT. HOUSE - BATHROOM - NIGHT

43.

MOTHER AND RALPH.

Ralph is sitting on the closed lid of the toilet.
Mother stands over him menacingly.

MOTHER

Now I want you to tell me where
you heard that word.

RALPH

Uh... uh...

MOTHER

The truth, now. Where did you
hear that word?

RALPH

Er...

Mother sticks bar of soap in Ralph's mouth.

MOTHER

Now you're not going to take
that out until you're ready to
tell me where you heard that
word.

NARRATOR

After a while, I got to be quite
a connoisseur of soap. My
personal preference is for Lux,
but I found Palmolive had a nice,
piquant after-dinner flavor,
heady, but with just a touch
of mellow smoothness.

Ralph sits on the toilet, bar of soap in mouth.
Mother stands over him impassively.

NARRATOR

Lifebuoy, on the other hand...

RALPH

Mumphf, ummmfffff.....

(CONTINUED)

43. CONTINUED

43.

MOTHER

Are you ready to tell me?

Ralph nods yes. Mother removes soap.

MOTHER

(continuing)

All right. Now, where did you hear that word?

NARRATOR

Now I had heard that word at least ten times a day from my Old Man. My father worked in Profanity the way another artist might work in oils, or clay, the way Michelangelo worked in marble. It was his true medium, and he was a master at it.

MOTHER

I'm waiting.

NARRATOR

But... I chickened out. I groped desperately and blurted out the first name that came to mind.

RALPH

(blurts)

Schwartz!

MOTHER

Oh. I see.

His Mother puts the bar of soap back in Ralph's mouth. With an air of grim determination, she turns on her heel and goes to the phone. She dials, pauses.

MOTHER

(continuing)

Hello, Mrs. Schwartz? Yes, fine, how are you? Mrs. Schwartz, do you know what Ralph just said?

Pause. We hear GIBBLE-GIBBLE of Mrs. Schwartz's reply but cannot hear the words.

(CONTINUED)

43. CONTINUED

43.

MOTHER

(continuing)

Well, no. He said...

She puts hand over mouthpiece and whispers.

MRS. SCHWARTZ (V.O.)

(very faintly)

Eeeeeek!

MOTHER

Yes. That. And do you
know where he heard it?

(long dramatic
pause)

From your son!

Mother stands holding phone. We hear quick TAP-
TAP-TAP of Mrs. Schwartz's HEELS retreating. Suddenly,
very faintly, there is a SCREAM.

NARRATOR

Retribution had come to
Schwartz. Another shot
of mysterious, inexorable
official Justice. Justice?
Injustice? It is immaterial.
We are all guilty, in one
way or another, and
Schwartz was no exception.

Mother hangs up phone, returns to bathroom, removes
soap from Ralph's mouth.

MOTHER

All right. Now go to bed. I'm
glad you finished your homework
this afternoon, because I want
you to put the light off and
get right into bed. No
reading comic books, you're
being punished. I'm going
to come up, and I don't
want to see that light on.

(CONTINUED)

43. CONTINUED 43.

Ralph goes slowly up the stairs.

44. INT. BEDROOM - RALPH - NIGHT 44.

Ralph lies forlornly on his bed. In the UPPER LEFT-HAND CORNER OF THE SCREEN, above his head, we see a PROJECTION of what he is thinking.

45. EXT. FRONT WALK - DAY 45.

SCENE WIDENS until walk FILLS WHOLE FRAME.

CLOSEUP OF WHITE CANE

tap-tapping up front steps. Cane taps on door.
Huge tall door opens.

46. EXT/INT. HOUSE - DAY 46.

RALPHIE'S POV

Mother stands in doorway, looking down at the pathetic little figure before her. Father stands behind her.

MOTHER

(appalled)

Hoh, my God, Ralphie!

Oh, my God! What's

happened to you?

FATHER

Come on in, Ralph. Where
have you been?

MOTHER

Why, he's carrying a cane!

What's happened to you, Ralph?

(CONTINUED)

46. CONTINUED

46.

Little Ralph, saying nothing, bravely taps his way into the house.

CLOSEUP - RANDY

looking horrified, peering out from under the dining room table.

Mother leads Ralph to the kitchen table. Ralph sits bravely at table.

MOTHER

(brokenly)

Ralph, is it something we did?

Ralph bravely smiles; shakes his head no. A tear runs down under his dark glasses.

FATHER

Please, Ralph. We know it's our fault. What did we do? What is it? What has brought you to this lowly state?

Ralph is silent.

MOTHER

Please, Ralph. Please tell us, no matter how it hurts. What is it? What did we do?

Ralph turns his head, fighting back the pain.

MOTHER

(continuing)

Oh, please. Please. I must know what we did. What brought this on?

RALPHIE

(against his will)

It was...

MOTHER

Yes?

RALPHIE

It was...

(CONTINUED)

46. CONTINUED

46.

MOTHER

Yes, yes?

RALPHIE

(breaking down)

...Soap Poisoning.

Mother sinks down beside Father. They cling together.

MOTHER

Oh, my God! Oh, my God! I'll
never forgive myself! How could
I have done it!

Ralph puts his hand on his Father's sob-wracked shoulders. Randy clings lovingly to Ralph's ankle.

RALPHIE

I'll get along...somehow. I
deserved it.

MOTHER

You're so brave, Ralph.

NARRATOR

There has never been a kid who
didn't believe, vaguely
but insistently, that he would
be stricken blind before he
reached twenty-one. And then
they'd be sorry!

Ralph's face, larger and larger, moves INTO FRAME. His
poor, blank, blind eyes stare INTO THE CAMERA. One
large tear rolls down his cheek. FOCUS on large tear.

DISSOLVE TO:

MONTAGE

47. EXT. ALLEYWAY - LONG SHOT - LOOKING THROUGH SOME
FENCE SLATS - DAY

47.

We see Ralphie, Flick and the others fly past. The
SHOT remains empty for a moment then we see Dill and
Farkas fly past.

48. EXT. SCHOOL - DAY

48.

Snow and WIND HOWLS

49. INT. SCHOOL - DAY

49.

It is Friday. The children are filing into class. Every third or fourth child pauses to give Miss Shields a little gift as is the custom. We see the booty piling up, mostly apples a few cupcakes, some cookies, a solitary flower.

Suddenly a pineapple, a very large and particularly tropical looking pineapple is placed upon the desk. A pineapple in Hohman during the depression is a sight indeed.

Ralphie's face eases up through the foliage on top of the pineapple. He grins a grin about as subtle as "Oilcan Harry." Miss Shields looks at him in amazement.

RALPHIE

I thought you might be
getting tired of them same
old stuff.

MISS SHIELDS

Why -- thank you, Ralph!

Ralph slides away.

50. EXT. ALLEYWAY LONG SHOT - SAME FENCE WE SAW EARLIER
- DAY

50.

Silence, then we hear the POUNDING OF FEET. Ralphie and the others go thundering past. Silence, then Dill and Farkas come racing by. HOLD on the silence a moment.

51.

EXT. - RALPH'S HOUSE - LONG SHOT - DAY

51.

Ralph comes dashing up to the mailbox and stops to catch his breath, looking behind him.

NARRATOR

Grover Dill was just another of the hostile elements of nature like the wind and the snow and the Boogie Man and as such could be tolerated. But the agony of waiting for the days to pass so I could receive my theme in triumph was unbearable. I was nearing madness.

Ralph straightens up and looks into the mailbox.

NARRATOR

(continuing)

But we are given that which we need to survive. Everything comes to he who waits.

Ralph takes a large envelope out of the box.

NARRATOR

(continuing)

There are few things more thrilling in life than lumpy letters that rattle. Even to this day I feel a wild surge of exultation when I run my hands over an envelope that is thick, fat and pregnant with mystery. I ripped it open and there it was -- my simulated-gold plastic decoder pin. With knob. And my membership card.

CAMERA CUTS TO the letter:

BE IT KNOWN TO ALL AND SUNDRY
THAT MR. RALPH WESLEY PARKER IS
HEREBY APPOINTED A MEMBER OF THE
LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE SECRET
CIRCLE AND IS ENTITLED TO ALL
THE HONORS AND BENEFITS ACCRUING
THERE TO.

(CONTINUED)

51. CONTINUED

51.

NARRATOR

Signed: Little Orphan Annie.
Countersigned: Pierre Andre.
In ink! Honors and benefits.
Already, at the age of nine.

52. INT. HOUSE - RALPH - EVENING

52.

Ralph races to the radio and whirls the dial frantically.

NARRATOR

My excitement mounted. Running waves of goose pimples rippled up and down my spine as I hunched next to the radio. A pause, a station break...

RADIO (V.O.)

Who's that little chatterbox...
The one with curly auburn locks...
Who do I see...?
It's Little Orphan Annie.

Ralph hunches closer to radio.

NARRATOR

Let's get on with it! I don't need all this jazz about smugglers and pirates. I sat through Sandy's arfing and Little Orphan Annie's perils hardly hearing a word. On comes, at long last, old Pierre. He's one of my friends now. I am In. My first secret meeting!

RADIO (V.O.)

OKAY, FELLAS AND GALS. GET OUT YOUR DECODER PINS. TIME FOR THE SECRET MESSAGE FOR ALL THE REGULAR PALS OF LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE, MEMBERS OF THE LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE SECRET CIRCLE. ALL SET? HERE WE GO. SET YOUR PINS AT B-12.

We see Ralph frantically setting his pin.

(CONTINUED)

52. CONTINUED

52.

NARRATOR

My eyes narrowed to mere slits, my steely claws working with precision, I set my simulated-gold plastic decoder pin to B-12.

RADIO (V.O.)

ALL READY? PENCILS SET?

Ralph licks point of pencil.

NARRATOR

Old Pierre was in great voice tonight. I could tell that tonight's message was really important.

RADIO (V.O.)

SEVEN... TWENTY-TWO...
THIRTEEN... NINETEEN... EIGHT!

We see Ralph writing like mad, brow furrowed in manic concentration.

NARRATOR

I struggled furiously to keep up with his booming voice dripping with tension and excitement. Finally...

RADIO (V.O.)

OKAY, KIDS. THAT'S TONIGHT'S SECRET MESSAGE. LISTEN AGAIN TOMORROW NIGHT, WHEN YOU HEAR...
Who's that little chatterbox...
The one with curly auburn locks...?

53. INT. BATHROOM - RALPH - EVENING

53.

NARRATOR

Ninety seconds later I am in the only room in the house where a boy of nine could sit in privacy and decode. My pin is on one knee, my Indian Chief tablet on the other. I'm starting to decode.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

7...
I spun the dial, poring over the plastic scale of letters. Aha! B. I carefully wrote down my first decoded number. I went to the next.

22...
Again I spun the dial. E. The first word is B-E.

13... S.
It was coming easier now.
19... U.

From somewhere out in the house I could hear my kid brother whimpering, his wail gathering steam, then the faint shriek of my mother.

MOTHER (O.S.)

Hurry up! Randy's gotta go!

RALPHIE

I'll be right out, Ma! Gee whiz!

NARRATOR

S... U... 15... R... E.
Be sure! A message was coming through! Excitement gripped my gut. I was getting The Word. Be sure...

14... 8... T... O... Be sure to what? What was Little Orphan Annie trying to say?

Ralph scribbles more frantically, running hand through hair distractedly.

MOTHER (O.S.)

(with annoyance)

Ralphie! Come ON!

RALPHIE

(frantic)

All RIGHT, Ma! I'll be right out!

NARRATOR

17... 9... DR... 16... 12...
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

1... 9... N... K... 32...
OVA... 19... LT...
I sat for a long moment in
that steamy room, staring
down at my Indian Chief
notebook. A crummy commercial.

We hear another THIN WAIL from Randy, O.S.

RALPH

I'll be right out, Ma! For
crying out loud.

NARRATOR

I pulled up my corduory pants
and went out to face the meat
loaf and the red cabbage.
Punjab had decapitated another
victim.

Randy races past Ralph into the bathroom. Ralph con-
tinues on down to the kitchen.

NARRATOR

(continuing)

The agony crept over me.
Again I hoped dinner would
bring relief. Maybe there
was a surprise.

Ralph peers into the pot on the stove.

NARRATOR

(continuing)

Ha, fat chance -- red cabbage.
I didn't even bother to look
in the oven where the
perpetual meatloaf sizzled.
My mother was hanging over
her sink, swabbing eternally
with her Brillo pad. If
mothers had a coat of arms in
the midwest, it would consist
of crossed plumber's helpers
rampant on a field of Brillo
pads..

MOTHER

Did you wash up?

(CONTINUED)

RALPHIE

Yeah!

NARRATOR

What happened next was rather unreal. My mother walked out of the kitchen with her watering can in tow bound for her nasturtiums. There was a brief moment of silence then a loud crash from the living room and a phony stifled gasp. Another split second of silence while the fuse sputtered and ignited -- and then it began -- The Old Man knew -- he had been fearing it since the very first day.

The bathroom door flies open and The Old Man stands framed in the doorway, a wild look in his eyes.

FATHER

What broke? What happened?
What broke!

NARRATOR

(mimicking Mother's
voice)

'The lamp,' said my mother in a soft phony voice, feigning heartbreak.

The Old Man rushes headlong down the stairs and into the living room.

FATHER

Where is it where is it?

NARRATOR

There it was. The shattered kneecap under the coffee table, the cracked, well-turned ankle under the radio -- that voluptuous poem of feminine pulchritude -- split open like a rotten watermelon, its entrails of insulated wire hanging out limply over the rug.

(CONTINUED)

53. CONTINUED

53.

The Old Man drops to his knees amid the debris.

MOTHER

I... don't know what
happened. I was watering
the flowers and...

The Old Man looks at her for a long moment then speaks
in measured voice.

FATHER

You were always jealous of
that lamp.

MOTHER

Jealous? Of a plastic leg?

FATHER

You were jealous because I
won!

MOTHER

That's ridiculous! Jealous!
Jealous of what? That was the
ugliest lamp I ever saw!

NARRATOR

Now it was out, irretrievably.

The Old Man draws himself up to his full height and
glares at her with bristling dignity.

NARRATOR

(continuing)

At least, ten years before
the phrase was coined my
mother and father began the
cold war.

FATHER

(in a commanding
voice)

Get the glue.

MOTHER

We're out of glue.

NARRATOR

The Old Man stood quivering
with fury...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

53. CONTINUED

53.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

...stammering as he tried to
come up with a crushing retort
-- managing only --

FATHER

Dammit!

He turns and races from the house nearly taking the door with him. There is silence for a moment, then the door is ripped open and The Old Man bellows:

FATHER

(continuing)

Don't touch it! Don't touch
that lamp!

He wheels and slams the door! Silence.

DISSOLVE TO:

54. EXT./INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

54.

It is later. We are looking at the house in LONG SHOT. We see The Old Man silhouetted in the window trying to repair the lamp.

NARRATOR

To this day, I can still see my father, wearing his straw hat, swearing under his breath, walking around a shattered lady's leg, a Freudian image to make Edward Albee's best effort pale into insignificance.

55. INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

55.

We see The Old Man bending intently over the leg.

NARRATOR

(continuing)

Time and again, it looked almost successful. Then he would remove his hand slowly -- Boing the kneecap would spring up and sail across the room and the whole thing would collapse!

56. EXT./INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

56.

We see and hear the lamp come CRASHING to the floor. The Old Man disappears out of the window for a long moment. Suddenly he appears out the front door, makes his way to the side of the house and dumps the whole mess in the garbage. He marches resolutely back into the house. After a moment we hear his voice faintly.

FATHER

I won't forget this -- ever.

The house sits there tranquilly in the brilliant winter air. We hear the FAINT STRAINS of "O Little Town of Bethlehem."

DISSOLVE TO:

57. EXT. RALPH'S HOUSE - DAY

57.

It is a raw, wind-whipped day. Cheery smoke pours out of every chimney except one, which belches out black acrid puffs.

CAMERA ZOOMS INTO the smoke. We hear The Old Man ROARING out his defiance of the villainous furnace.

CAMERA PANS DOWN the house TO the front door. We see Ralphie and Randy being hurried out by their anxious Mother.

MED. SHOT - RALPHIE, FLICK - DAY

We see Ralphie pursued by the bowling ball which is his brother, Randy. They run down the walk and join Flick. They punch arms and then head out for school.

58. EXT. SCHOOL GROUNDS - THE BOYS, DILL - DAY

58.

Ralph and the others move INTO VIEW. We see Grover Dill lounging about the ice-encrusted jungle gym.

DILL

Hey, Fat Mess. Come over here.
I wanna talk to you.

(CONTINUED)

58. CONTINUED

58.

NARRATOR

Ordinarily, if Dill so much as said 'Hi' to you, you felt great and warm inside. But mostly he just hit you in the mouth.

RALPH

I can't, Grover. I gotta report to Miss Shields.

NARRATOR

The audacity of this ploy stunned everyone, myself most of all. There was no retreating, however. I knew I would pay later.

Ralphie runs for school.

DILL

Hey you!

Dill is furious. He turns to the luckless Flick.

DILL

(continuing)

You! Get over here.

NARRATOR

I felt vaguely guilty for leaving Flick and Schwartz to certain annihilation, but BB Gun Mania knows no loyalties.

59. INT. CLASSROOM - CLOSEUP - MISS SHIELDS - DAY

59.

MISS SHIELDS

All right, class, I have your Christmas themes for you. I'm pleased. They were generally very good.

Flick files by, his eye is blackened.

CLOSEUP - RALPHIE

He virtually pants with anticipation, ignoring Flick.

(CONTINUED)

59. CONTINUED

59.

NARRATOR

I held my breath as the papers came down the row. I imagined Miss Shields was restraining her praise in deference to the ordinary intelligences of my classmates.

CLOSEUP - THE HANDS OF THE KIDS

passing the themes back along the rows. CAMERA PANS with the hands.

CLOSEUP - RALPH

He is turning red from holding his breath.

CLOSEUP

CAMERA PANS with the papers down the row.

CLOSEUP - RALPH

CLOSEUP - THE PAPERS

They arrive at Ralph's desk. He extricates his and passes the others on. CAMERA PANS UP To his face as he unfolds his theme. His face drops. CAMERA PANS BACK DOWN TO the paper and we see the grade C- pulsating IN AND OUT OF FOCUS.

NARRATOR

My first impulse was that obviously a mistake had been made. But then I saw it -- it leaped off the page and around the room and fastened itself leechlike on the back of my neck.

CAMERA CUTS BACK UP TO Ralphie's face, then TILTS BACK TO the paper and PANS DOWN and ZOOMS TO the fateful words. They pulsate in red:

(CONTINUED)

59. CONTINUED

59.

P.S. You'll shoot your eyes
out.

NARRATOR

(continuing)

My mother had gotten to Miss Shields. There could be no other explanation. Was there no end to this conspiracy of irrational prejudice against Red Ryder and his peace-maker? I gloomily watched other happier kids who were all going to get what they wanted for Christmas. Despair settled over me like a three-hundred-pound lady sitting on my head.

DISSOLVE TO:

60. EXT. ALLEYWAY - LONG SHOT - RALPHIE, GROVER, KIDS,
MOTHER, EXTRA - DAY

60.

The CAMERA CATCHES the forlorn figure of Ralph walking dejectedly to his house. We MOVE IN on him as he kicks a slab of dirty ice down the sidewalk. Randy tags along behind.

NARRATOR

Night falls fast in Northern Indiana. Snow was drifting softly through the feeble yellow glow of the distant street lamps while around me unbridled merriment raged. I had all but abandoned hope, which may partially explain what happened next.

We are CLOSE on Ralph's face when suddenly a brackish snowball about the size of a basketball whistles INTO FRAME and smacks Ralph right in the kisser. It nearly knocks him off his feet. He clears the slush from his eyes and chokes back the tears that threaten to well up. He looks O.S.

LONG SHOT - GROVER DILL

is seen walking in his cocky manner down the street toward Ralph.

(CONTINUED)

60. CONTINUED

60.

DILL

Hey, Fat Mess. How'd ya like
your snowball sandwich!

Dill and Scut Farkas laugh their nasty little laugh as
they approach Ralph.

MED. SHOT - RALPH

CAMERA MOVES SLOWLY INTO Ralph's face.

NARRATOR

Somewhere deep in the recesses
of my brain a tiny red-hot
little flame began to grow.

Dill has strutted up and stands, legs spread, in front
of Ralph.

DILL

Listen, Jerk, when I tell ya
to come over, ya better come
over.

NARRATOR

By this time my red demon
had grown to man size and
came exploding out of my
eyes and ears and mouth.

Ralphie explodes all over the startled Dill, knocking
him flat on his back and begins pounding him.

NARRATOR

(continuing)

Bravery does not exist, just
a kind of latent nuttiness.
If I had thought about
attacking Dill for ten
seconds before I had done it,
I'd have been four blocks
away in a minute flat. But
something had happened. A
fuse blew and I had gone out
of my skull.

Ralph and Dill begin to fight in earnest.

(CONTINUED)

60. CONTINUED

60.

NARRATOR

(continuing)

I have since heard of people under extreme duress speaking in strange tongues. I became conscious that a steady torrent of obscenities and swearing was pouring out of me as I screamed.

(The swearing will be indistinguishable, lost under narration.)

NARRATOR

(continuing)

I could hear my brother running home, hysterically yelling for my mother, but only dimly. Dill fought back like a fiend! But I guess it was the first time he had ever met, face to face, with an unleashed Tasmanian Devil.

LONG SHOT

We see Ralph's Mother arriving.

NARRATOR

I continued to swear fantastically, as though I had no control over it. I was conscious of it and yet it was as though it was coming from something or someone outside of me.

Boys continue to fight insanely. Dill by this time is wailing hysterically. This has never happened to him before. They drag the two kids apart amid a great ring of surging grownups and exultant, scared kids who know more about what is happening than the mothers and fathers ever could. Ralphie's Mother looks at him for a long moment.

MOTHER

What did you say?

(CONTINUED)

60. CONTINUED

60.

NARRATOR

That's all. There was a funny look on her face. At that instant all thought of Grover Dill disappeared from what was left of my mind and all I could think of was the incredible shame of that unbelievable tornado of obscenity I had sprayed over the neighborhood.

DISSOLVE TO:

61. INT. HOUSE - RALPHIE - DUSK

61.

NARRATOR

I got into the house in a daze. My mother put water on me in the bathroom, pouring it over my head and dabbing at my eyes which were puffed and red from hysteria.

MOTHER

You'd better go in and lie down on the daybed. Take it easy. Just go in and lie down.

62. INT. BEDROOM - DUSK

62.

She takes Ralph by the shoulder and pushes him down on the daybed. He lies there scared, really scared of what he has done.

NARRATOR

The light was getting purple and soft outside, almost time for my father to come home from work. I was just lying there.

CLOSEUP - RANDY under the sink.

NARRATOR

My kid brother by now was under the sink in the john, hiding among the mops, mewing occasionally.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

62. CONTINUED

62.

NARRATOR (cont'd)

I heard the car roar up the driveway and a wave of terror broke over me. I heard him in the kitchen now.

MOTHER

Supper's ready. Come on, kids, wash up.

NARRATOR

I painfully dragged myself off the daybed and sneaked along the woodwork, under the buffet, sneaking, skulking into the bathroom. My kid brother and I washed together over the sink. He said nothing.

63. INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

63.

Ralph walks into the kitchen and sits down.

FATHER

Well, what happened today?

NARRATOR

Here it comes! There was a short pause, and then my mother said:

MOTHER

Oh, not much. Ralph had a little fight.

FATHER

Fight? What kind of fight?

MOTHER

Oh, you know how kids are.

NARRATOR

The axe is poised over my naked neck! There is no way out!

(CONTINUED)

63. CONTINUED

63.

MOTHER

Oh, it wasn't much. I gave him a talking to. By the way, I see the Bears are playing Green Bay on Sunday.

Mother resumes her endless table-to-stove-to-refrigerator-to-table-to-stove treadmill.

FATHER

Yeah, Zudock has tickets. Boy, I wish I did. Oh well, you'd freeze your keister off out there.

Father shovels in more meatloaf.

NARRATOR

I slowly began to realize that I was not about to be destroyed.

Mother, leaning over to serve more red cabbage to Father, casually leans her arm against Ralph's shoulder and gives him a friendly, understanding little bump. Father does not notice.

NARRATOR

(continuing)

From then on, things were different between me and my mother.

Ralph resumes eating, this time as though he were actually tasting the food. Mother goes from table to stove. Father eats. Randy whines. Life is back to normal.

64. INT. BEDROOM - RALPH - NIGHT

64.

Ralph lies in bed.

NARRATOR

The cold air blew the curtains back and forth...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

64. CONTINUED

64.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

... as we caught the tail of a wind from the Great North Woods, the wilderness at the head of the Lake. Both of us rested quietly, me and my little red-eyed fanged, furry Tasmanian Devil. We rested. For the time being.

DISSOLVE TO:

65. EXT. HOHMAN STREET - FAMILY, CROWD - NIGHT

65.

We see an EXTREME CLOSEUP of a huge Santa's head. It appears to be bobbing along in the air. CAMERA PULLS BACK and we realize that what we have been seeing was a huge rubber Santa. We now realize we are seeing the Hohman Christmas Parade. CAMERA PANS AND ZOOMS TO Ralph and the family watching the parade flow by. Jingle Bells fills the air.

NARRATOR

I had awakened that morning with the glowing realization that all was not yet lost. There was one last hope, one appeal as yet unfiled, one glorious, maddening ray of Daisy sunshine that had as yet not shone forth. The Big Man himself, Number One. The Head Honcho. The Connection -- Santa Claus! Now it is well-known that foolish men stuff themselves with pillows and other such devices and run around ringing bells in the street in order to siphon off some of the Christmas largess, but it is equally well-known that the real Santa Claus can be found at Higbee's Department Store in Hohman, Indiana, and this is the official Court Of Last Appeal.

(CONTINUED)

65. CONTINUED

65.

CAMERA PANS OFF the parade as the last Shriners march past and TILTS UP to see the huge Santa and reindeer above the gold-plated Higbee's Department Store sign.

CUT TO:

66. INT. HIGBEE'S - FAMILY, CROWD - NIGHT

66.

We PULL BACK from the real Santa's laughing face to TAKE IN the full scope of Higbee's Department Store. We see milling crowds of blue-jowled, agate-eyed, foundry workers, grey-faced refinery men, motley hordes of open hearth, slag heap, Bessemer converter, tin mill, coke plant and welding shop fugitives trudging through the wildly pulsing store, through floor after floor of shiny, beautiful, unattainable treasures, trailed by millions of leatherette-jacketed, high-topped, muffled kids. Worried-looking, flush-faced mothers wearing frayed cloth coats with ratty fox-fur collars, their hands chapped and raw from years of dishwater therapy, ride herd on the surging mob, ranging far and wide into the aisles and under the counters; cuffing, slapping, dragging whiners of all sizes from department to department.

Ralph, Randy, Mother and Father are carried forward by the waves of maddened shoppers. They pause by a counter, confer briefly, heads together. We do not hear what is being said, but then Mother and Father go off in the direction of the Men's Department. CAMERA STAYS with Ralph and Randy as they get on the end of a long line of nervous, fidgeting, greedy urchins waiting to see Santa Claus.

NARRATOR

The line waiting to see Santa Claus stretched back at least to Terre Haute, and I was at the end of it and closing time of ten o'clock was racing nearer.

LONG SHOT - THE LINE

It stretches like a human snake reaching to infinity.

(CONTINUED)

NARRATOR

It was not easy to disbelieve fully in Santa Claus, because there wasn't much else to believe in, and there were many theological arguments over the nature of, the existence of, the affirmation and denial of his existence.

The shoving, restless, sniffing, whining line slowly inches forward. Far ahead we see a gigantic snowy throne, framed with red-and-white candy canes, under a suspended squadron of plastic angels blowing silver trumpets. The line slowly moves forward.

CLOSEUP - STORE CLOCK

9:45.

NARRATOR

Most of us were scoffers, but moments before Zero Hour, with the air pulsing to the strains of We Three Kings Of Orient Are, the store windows garlanded with red and green wreaths and the Toy Department bristling with shiny Flexible Flyers, there were few who dared to disbelieve.

We see (RALPH'S POV) a glowing golden grotto at the top of a high ramp. Ramp, seen through Ralph's eyes, is exaggeratedly high, like a soaring glass mountain stretching up to infinity before the kids.

NARRATOR

(continuing)

The atheists among us grew moodier and less and less sure of themselves, until finally in each scoffing heart was the floating, drifting, nagging suspicion: Well, you never can tell. It did not pay to take chances, and so we waited in line for our turn.

(CONTINUED)

Behind Ralph and Randy a skinny seven-year-old girl wearing a brown stocking cap and gold-rimmed glasses hits her little brother steadily to keep him in line. He is wearing an aviator's helmet with goggles pulled down over his eyes. His galoshes are open and his maroon corduroy knickers are damp. Behind them, a fat boy in a huge sheepskin coat stands numbly, his eyes watering in vague fear, his nose red and running.

CAMERA TAKES IN long line, an uneven procession of stocking caps, mufflers, mittens and earmuffs inching painfully forward, while in the hazy distance, in his magic glowing cave, SANTA CLAUS waits to sit each in turn on his broad red knee. Over the serpentine line roars a great sea of sound: TINKLING BELLS, RECORDED CAROLS, THE HUM AND CLATTER OF ELECTRIC TRAINS, WHISTLES TOOTING, MECHANICAL COWS MOOING, CASH REGISTERS DINGING, and from far off in the faint distance the "Ho-ho-ho-ing" of jolly old Saint Nick.

Ralph and Randy wind slowly through the Tricycle and Bicycle Department, jostled and pushed by the hordes of kids behind them. Suddenly they reach the head of the line, the foot of Mount Olympus itself. Santa's enormous gleaming white snowdrift of a throne soars ten or fifteen feet above their heads on a mountain of red and green tinsel carpeted with flashing Christmas tree bulbs and gleaming ornaments.

Each kid in turn is prodded up a tiny staircase at the side of the mountain on Santa's left as Santa passes his last customer on to his right and down a winding red chute which gives the kid a little ride down to floor level and back into oblivion for another year. Pretty ladies dressed in Snow White costumes, gauzy gowns glittering with sequins and tiaras clipped to their golden, artificial hair, preside at the head of the line, directing traffic and keeping order.

Randy begins to hang back, whining and whimpering steadily. Ralph herds him ahead of himself while, behind, the girl in the glasses does the same with her kid brother. SNOW WHITE grabs Randy's shoulder with an iron grip, launching him up the slope.

SNOW WHITE

(a harsh bark)

Get moving, kid. Quit dragging your feet.

(CONTINUED)

66. CONTINUED

66.

Deafening MUSIC blasts from the SPEAKERS above:
JINGLE BELLS, JINGLE BELLS, JINGLE ALL THE WAY sung
by ten thousand echo-chambered reverberating chipmunks.

RALPH'S POV

We see his brother's tiny yellow and brown stocking cap as it bobs on Santa's lap what seems miles above the floor. We hear a thin, high trailing wail. Suddenly the abyss opens before Ralph.

BACK TO SCENE

Snow White grabs his elbow with an iron claw and Ralph begins to struggle upward toward the mountaintop.

NARRATOR

I have always felt that later generations of tots, products of less romantic upbringing, cynical non-believers in Santa Claus from birth, can never know the nature of the true dream. I was well into my twenties before I finally gave up on the Easter Bunny, and I am not convinced that I am the richer for it. I had long before decided to level with Santa, to really lay it on the line. No kid stuff. If I was going to ride the range with Red Ryder, Santa Claus was going to have to get the straight poop.

This Santa Claus is not the conventional department store Santa, but rather Santa as he is seen through a child's eyes. He is ENORMOUS, seemingly eight feet tall; high shiny black patent-leather boots, a nimbus of snow white beard, and a real thrumming, belt-creaking stomach. His voice is amplified to a thundering pitch. He seems vast, immense, enormous, world-filling, God like to the eyes of Ralph.

SANTA

And what's your name, little boy?

(CONTINUED)

Ralph quails as Santa reaches down and neatly hooks his sheepskin collar, swooping him upward. Ralph sits on Santa's huge knee, looking down and out over the endless expanse of Toyland and down to the tiny figures that wind off into the distance.

RALPHIE

Ah.....uh.....uhhhhhh.

SANTA

That's a fine name, little boy! Ho-ho-ho! And what do you want for Christmas, little boy?

Ralph stares straight ahead in mindless panic. His mouth opens, snaps shut convulsively, open again with a feeble croak.

RALPHIE

Ehhhhrrrrr.....

NARRATOR

My mind had gone blank! Frantically I tried to remember what it was I wanted. I was blowing it!

RALPHIE

Uhhhh....

SANTA

Wouldn't you like a nice football?

NARRATOR

My mind groped. Football, football. Without conscious will my voice squeaked out.

RALPHIE

Yeah!

SANTA

Ho-ho-ho!

NARRATOR

My God, a football!

(CONTINUED)

66. CONTINUED

66.

Ralph is being slid off Santa's knee and deposited in the red chute for his slide to the ground floor.

Just as he begins to slide he comes to and, struggling frantically, claws his way back up to the lip of the chute and thrusts his face up over it desperately.

RALPHIE

(all in a rush semi-hysterically)
No! No! I want an official Red
Ryder carbine-action two-hundred-
shot Range Model air rifle with
a special sight and a compass in
the stock with a sundial!!

Santa looks in surprise at the absurd figure of Ralph clinging to the chute.

SANTA

Ho-ho-ho! You'll shoot your
eye out, kid. Ho-ho-ho.
Merry Christmas!

Santa reaches out gently with his boot and gives Ralph a little shove. We hear this "NOOOOOOOO" ECHO as he disappears.

NARRATOR

Down the chute I went. I have never been struck by a bolt of lightning, but I know how it must feel. The back of my head was numb. My feet clanked leadenly beneath me as I returned to earth at the bottom of the chute.

Ralph meets Randy, who stands snivelling under a counter piled high with Raggedy Ann dolls. From nowhere, Mother and Father reappear.

FATHER

Did you tell Santa what you wanted?

(CONTINUED)

66 CONTINUED

66.

RALPHIE

....yeah.

FATHER

Did he ask you if you had been
a good boy?

RALPHIE

No.

FATHER

Ha! Don't worry. He knows
anyway. He knows.

NARRATOR

Maybe that was it! My mind
reeled with the realization
that maybe Santa did know
how rotten I had been and
that the football was not
only a threat but a punish-
ment. I could see that
either my father, or Santa,
or perhaps both were not
content to let bygones be
bygones.

Ralph looks hangdog. All hope is gone. The family, like
a salmon swimming upstream, begin to struggle through the
crowd to the front doors of the store. From the distance
we can still hear Santa Claus.

SANTA (O.S.)

Merry Christmas. Ho-ho-ho!

DISSOLVE TO:

67. EXT. PARKER HOUSE - NIGHT

67.

The house is nestled in the snow. The night is crisp and
brilliant.

68. INT. LIVING ROOM - RALPH, RANDY, MOTHER, FATHER - NIGHT 68.

It is after dinner. The family is trimming the tree on this most important of all nights, Christmas Eve. The tree, complete with a bare spot which did not "fluff out" is standing in its little red tin holder, fragrantly, toweringly, teeteringly.

Father stands on a ladder, also teetering, stringing lights to the top of the tree.

FATHER

All right. Plug 'em in.

Mother scrambled around, finds extension cord under sofa, plugs in Christmas tree lights.

FATHER

Son of a bitch!

MOTHER

What's the matter?

FATHER

Them green ones ain't lit.
Dammit!

MOTHER

The green ones are lit. It's
the blue ones.....

FATHER

Don't tell me, dammit!

Father scrambles down the ladder, gets a new bulb, runs back up the ladder to the top of the tree, screws in the new bulb.

FATHER

Okay. Plug 'er in again.

Mother plugs the string of lights into extension.

NARRATOR

Our entire world was strung
together with 'extensions'.
Outlets in our house were rare
and coveted.

The Christmas tree lights up.

(CONTINUED)

68. CONTINUED

68.

FATHER

Ah!

The Christmas Tree goes out, lights blink and dim, the kitchen light burns wildly for one moment, flickers, goes out.

FATHER

Dammit!

Father runs down the ladder, grabs the extension, and unplugs the tree lights.

FATHER

Get the extension from the toaster!

Ralph and Randy run to the kitchen.

NARRATOR

Occasionally in some houses a critical point was reached and one of these electrical bombs went off, sometimes burning down whole blocks of homes, or more often blowing out the main fuse, plunging half the town into darkness.

Ralph and Randy return, carrying the extension from the toaster.

FATHER

Okay, come on, give it here, let's go.

Father plugs the extension into a rat's nest of electrical junk, rams the plug from the tree into the extension, and hurries up the ladder.

FATHER

Okay. Plug it in.

Mother plugs it in. The Christmas tree lights up. The house remains lit.

(CONTINUED)

68. CONTINUED

68.

MOTHER

My, isn't that pretty.

FATHER

(admiringly)

Son of a bitch.

The tree stands in all its splendid fragrant beauty. Father comes down the ladder. The family stands in awed silence around the tree, drinking in its magnificent beauty.

FATHER

Okay, gimme the star.

Mother digs in the cardboard box. Father climbs the ladder.

MOTHER

Be careful.

FATHER

Oh, fer Chrissake, I know what I'm doing.

Father leans over from the ladder, and places the star at the top of the tree. For a moment all hang suspended. The tree glows; Ralph and Randy admire; Mother nervously wrings her hands. Then, slowly, majestically, the tree begins to tilt.

MOTHER

Oh! Be careful!

FATHER

Dammit. Son of a bitch!

Father grabs the top of the tree, and shoves it back upright. The star is now noticeably cockeyed.

FATHER

Ah. Okay.

Nobody mentions the crooked star.

FATHER

Perfect!

(CONTINUED)

68. CONTINUED

68.

He runs down the ladder, rubs his hands, and admires the tree. Mother sighs and wipes her hands on her apron. Mother glances at the clock.

MOTHER

Oh goodness look at the time. I hope Santa Claus hasn't had to pass up this house because some boys weren't in bed when he came by.

FATHER

Yeah, I heard some sleigh bells a while back headin' up the other side of the street.

RANDY

I wanta see Santa I wanta see Santa.

Randy dashes to the window.

RANDY

I was good all year Santa! Ralphie said bad words twice and I never said any.

RALPHIE

Hey!

MOTHER

Randy, Santa doesn't like tattletales.

Randy looks at them a moment of indecision flickers on his face. He turns back to the window

RANDY

But Ralphie didn't mean nothin' Santa.

RALPHIE

Squealer!

(CONTINUED)

68. CONTINUED

68.

MOTHER

Alright you two that's it.
Up the stairs.

FATHER

On the double.

The boys dash up the stairs. Mother and the Old Man look at one another.

69. EXT. RALPHIE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

69.

A light snow falls. CAMERA PEERS from across the street.

We see Mother and the Old Man as they play Santa Claus. The Old Man opens the front door and goes to the trunk of the Olds. It is a calculated risk.

Several of the Bumpuses' hounds stir. A howl sets up. The old man dashes for the door, slipping and sliding on the new snow. He makes the front door one step ahead of the furry mass.

70. INT. RALPH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

70.

Ralphie stares forelornly from his bed. We see the light snow falling outside his window.

CAMERA MOVES in on his face.

NARRATOR

Kid dreams die hard. Even though the official and final word had come down from Santa Claus himself. I found myself listening to some distant clamor of hope, after all bears had been spotted down at Pulaski's Candy Store.

(CONTINUED)

70. CONTINUED

70.

CAMERA MOVES in on Ralphie as he fantasizes.

71. EXT. ROOFTOP - NIGHT

71.

We see Santa Claus and the reindeer on a very fairy tale like snowcovered rooftop. He is being menaced by the same burglars from Ralphie's first fantasy.

Ralphie appears racing over the rooftops. He chases off the bandits with his trusty air rifle and is rewarded by Santa who piles present after present on top of Ralphie.

DISSOLVE TO:

72. INT/EXT. BEDROOM - BACKYARD - DAY

72.

Ralphie stirs from sleep. The bright light from the window makes him shield his eyes. He leans over the bed and peers out.

CAMERA PANS to look out the window into the backyard. An overnight ice storm has touched the neighborhood with a crystal wand.

The morning sun sends sprays of colored light radiating from the gnarled silver icicles that cover everything; trees, wires, eaves, fences. It is a fairy kingdom. Ralphie turns from the window.

RALPHIE

Randy! Come on!

73. INT. HOUSE - DAY

73.

We see Ralphie and Randy creeping down the stairs. They stop and stare into the living room.

CAMERA PULLS BACK to find great heaps of tissuey, crinkley, sparkly, enigmatic packages under the tree, half-hidden amid the folds of a white bedsheet that looks, in the soft light, like some magic snowbank.

Ralph and Randy stare in awe at the tree and the packages beneath it.

NARRATOR

Santa Claus had come! My brother circled around the tree, moaning softly, while I -- cooler and more controlled -- quickly eyed the mountain of revealingly wrapped largess. And knew the worst.

Mother and the Old Man enter behind them. They sit down and watch the kids' reaction to the presents.

NARRATOR

(continuing)

Christmas had officially begun. We plunged into the cornucopia, quivering with desire and the ecstasy of unbridled avarice.

In the background, on the RADIO, Lionel Barrymore's wheezy, friendly old voice speaks kindly of Bob Cratchit and Tiny Tim and the Ghost of Old Marley. Ralph grabs a package. It is tagged To Randy From Santa.

Ralph feverishly passes it over to Randy and returns to work. He pulls out a largish, lumpy, red-wrapped gift. We see the tag reads To Ralphie from Aunt Clara.

Frantically, Ralph tears the wrappings off. It is a pair of slippers. Bunny slippers. Ralph's mouth drops open.

(CONTINUED)

NARRATOR

(continuing)

Oh no. A pair of fuzzy, pink, idiotic, cross-eyed, lop-eared bunny slippers. Aunt Clara had for years labored under the delusion that I was not only perpetually four years old, but also a girl.

MOTHER

(adding oil to the flames)

Oh, aren't they sweet!

Ralph looks disgusted.

MOTHER

(continuing)

Aunt Clara always gives you the nicest presents. Put them on; see if they fit.

Ralph puts on slippers.

NARRATOR

Immediately my feet began to sweat as those two fluffy little bunnies with the blue button eyes stared sappily up at me.....and I knew that for at least two years I would have to wear them every time Aunt Clara visited us. I just hoped that Flick would never spot them, as the word of this humiliation could easily make life at Warren G. Harding School a veritable hell.

Next to Ralph, Randy silently, doggedly strips package after package until he hits the zeppelin.

RANDY

Wow! A zeppelin! Whee! Whoopee!
Wow!

(CONTINUED)

73. CONTINUED

73.

Randy launches it upward into the middle branches of the tree. Two glass angels and a golden bugle crash to the floor and a string of lights winks out.

RALPHIE

It's not supposed to fly,
you nut.

RANDY

Ahhhh. What good is a zeppelin
that don't fly?

RALPHIE

It rolls. And beeps.

Randy, on his knees, begins pushing zeppelin, beeping fiendishly, propellers clacking madly, across the living room rug.

NARRATOR

It was a sound that was to
become sickeningly familiar.

Randy continues to play with zeppelin. Ralph opens more packages: A Sandy Andy, a dump truck, a Monopoly game, etc.

NARRATOR

(continuing)

My brother's gift to me was the
only bright spot in an otherwise
remarkably mediocre haul: a
rubber Frankenstein face.

Ralph immediately puts on Frankenstein face.

MOTHER

Oh, how terrible. Take it
off and put it away.

FATHER

I think it looks good on him.

Ralph stands up, does his famous Frankenstein walk, clumping stiff legged around the living room and back to the tree.

(CONTINUED)

73. CONTINUED

73.

Finally it is all over. There are no more mysterious packages under the tree, only a great pile of crumpled tissue paper, string, and empty boxes. Randy lies dozing amid the rubble, the zeppelin clasped in one hand and his new fire truck in the other.

NARRATOR

There was no denying that I had scored heavily with the Simoniz and the fly swatter, as well as the zeppelin. The joy of giving can uplift the saddened heart. But then it came. I must admit I had been completely taken in.

Father leans forward in his easy chair, his eighth glass of wine in his hand. He gets up ceremoniously and moves over to the tree.

FATHER

Say!

(he pauses dramatically)
Don't I see something over there stuck behind the drapes? Why, I think there is something over there behind the drapes.

Ralph looks up, afraid to believe. He runs to drapes and pulls them out. Sure enough there it is, a long, heavy, red-wrapped package. It is marked To Ralphie, From Santa. Frantically, Ralph tears the wrappings off.

NARRATOR

A Red Ryder carbine-action range-model BB gun!

Ralph makes inarticulate gasps of surprise and ecstasy.

NARRATOR

(continuing)

Blue steel barrel graceful and taut, its dark, polished stock gleaming like all the treasures of the Western World. And there, burned
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

NARRATOR (cont'd)
into the walnut, his level
gaze unmistakable, his jaw
clean and hard, was Red Ryder
himself. His face was even
more beautiful and malevolent
than the pictures in the ad-
vertisements showed.

Father grins broadly, expansively. Mother smiles a weak,
doubtful smile. Over the RADIO thunders a thousand-voiced
heavenly choir: JOY TO THE WORLD, THE LORD HAS COME.

Ralph digs back into the box, comes up with tubes of BB'S
and black and white printed targets.

NARRATOR
(continuing)
I could hardly wait to try it
out, but the instruction book
said, in Red Ryder's own words:
Kids, never fire a BB gun in
the house. I never shoot
anybody but bad guys, and I
don't want any of my friends
hurt.

MOTHER
(in background, behind
Narrator)
All right, you try it out,
but outside and you be careful
Ralphie I still say those things
are dangerous.

Ralphie gathers up his booty and dashes out. The Old
Man and Mother look after him.

MOTHER
And don't shoot at bird's or
any animals.

OLD MAN
Except Bumpus Hounds!

(CONTINUED)

73. CONTINUED

73.

MOTHER

Now hush! Ralphie, be careful.

By this time Mother is in the kitchen and pulling a golden succulent turkey out of the oven. She places it on the table. The old man pulls some skin away.

MOTHER

For heavens sake it's not even done yet, now go read the funnies and let me work.

74. EXT. BACKYARD - DAY

74.

NARRATOR

I stood in the clean air, ready to consummate my great, long painful, ecstatic love affair.

Ralph brushes snow off front step, props up a gleaming Red Ryder target, the black rings and bull's eye standing out starkly against the snowy whiteness. He backs off into the snow a good twenty feet, slams the stock down onto his left kneecap, hooks his fingers into the icy carbine lever and cocks his blue-steel beauty for the first time.

Ralph sights over the barrel. Slowly, slowly he squeezes the frosty trigger. Back...back....back.

NARRATOR

(continuing)

For one instant I thought wildly, It doesn't work. We'll have to send it back. It...

CRAAAACK!

The gun jerks upward. Ralph's horn-rimmed glasses spin from his head into a snowbank. He stands paralyzed, not knowing what has happened. Blood trails down his cheek and onto the walnut stock of the Red Ryder BB gun.

(CONTINUED)

74. CONTINUED

74.

The BB has ricocheted off the tin target and struck Ralphie on the cheek.

Finally, snapping out of his daze, Ralph scrambles around in the snow for his glasses. He finds them at last.

NARRATOR

(continuing)

I knew immediately that I had not shot my eye out, but the glasses were another story. They were pulverized! Few things in those time brought such swift and terrible retribution on a kid as the pair of busted glasses. The left lens was out as clean as a whistle, and for a moment I thought I'll fake it! They'll never know the lens is gone! But then, gingerly fingering my rapidly swelling black eye, I realized that here was a shiner on the way that would top even the one I got from Grover Dill.

The back door opens just a crack. Ralph can see the blur of his Mother's Chinese-red chenille bathrobe.

MOTHER

(calling)

Be careful. Don't shoot your eye out!

NARRATOR

She hadn't seen. She didn't know. Rapidly, my mind evolved a spectacular plot. It would work. It had to work!

Ralph dashes into the house, meets Mother right inside the door. Mother sees his broken glasses, sees the long bloody scrape on his cheek.

(CONTINUED)

74. CONTINUED

74.

RALPHIE

(brokenly)

There was this icicle, and it fell, and it hit the gun, and then this icicle.....the gun flew up....and it bounced up and....and it cut....and I tried to get out of the way but.....the icicle fell off the roof and hit the gun and it bounced up and hit me and...

NARRATOR

I began to cry, faking it at first.

RALPHIE

(beginning to cry harder)

.....and it fell off the roof and I.....

75. INT. BATHROOM - RALPH, MOTHER - DAY

75.

Mother leads Ralph into the bathroom, wets washcloth in cold water, puts it on Ralph's cheek. Ralph still clutches BB gun to his chest.

MOTHER

(soothingly)

There now, see. It's just a little bump. You're lucky you didn't cut your eye. Those icicles sometimes even kill people. You're really lucky. Here, hold this rag on it.

NARRATOR

(OVER SHOT)

I HAD PULLED IT OFF!

OLD MAN (OFF)

What's goin' on?

(CONTINUED)

75. CONTINUED

75.

MOTHER

Nothing, we'll be right down
and stay away from that turkey.
It has to cook for another
hour. You'll get worms.

NARRATOR

Now it is well known through-
out the midwest that the old
man is a turkey junkie. A
bonafide galli turkecanus freak.
A few days before Christmas
his eyes would begin to gleam
with a wild and ravenous light.
Every few hours he would check
his carving set to make sure
the knife was honed, the fork
tines sharp.

76. INT. KITCHEN - DAY

76.

We see the Old Man leaning over the turkey drawing a long
deep draft of turkey essence into his nostrils. He glides
back to his chair and sits taking up the sports page with
great satisfaction.

77. INT. BATHROOM - DAY

77.

Mother is still cleaning Ralphie's wounds.

NARRATOR

Life is like that. Sometimes
at the height of our reveries
when our joy is at its zenith.
When all is most right with
the world, the most unthinkable
disasters descend upon us.

We hear a huge crash, followed closely by another,
then a thundering bellow from the Old Man.

78. INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

78.

We see the old man peering in horror over his newspaper. After a beat we see what the tragedy is. A blur streaks by the foreground of our shot. The old man stares. Then another blur whizzes by. Then another and we realize we are seeing the Bumpuses' hound. Now the whole pack roars past. The old man scrambles to his feet.

OLD MAN

Holy Christ, the turkey!
The turkey. Those goddamned
dogs. The turkey.

He races for the kitchen just in time to see the dogs leap upon the table, grab the twelve pound turkey and in a mass of snarling fury, disappear through the kitchen door all but taking it off the hinges.

Ralphie, Randy and Mother arrive just in time to see the Old Man staring out the door as the sound of the hounds recedes in the distance.

Finally the Old Man turns and walks back into the kitchen. He stands looking down at the big sheet of wax paper dripping with warm turkey gravy and big clumps of oyster stuffing.

NARRATOR

The heavenly aroma still hung heavy in the house. But it was gone -- all gone -- no turkey -- no turkey sandwiches no turkey salad, no turkey gravy, turkey hash, turkey a la king, or gallons of turkey soup, gone, all gone. The Old Man came as close to crying as I'd ever seen him come.

The Old Man stands there quivering with frustration. Finally,

OLD MAN

Get your coats! We're going to the chinese joint. We're going to have Chop Suey!

(CONTINUED)

78. CONTINUED

78.

The Old Man exits with flourish. CAMERA HOLDS on Mother, Ralphie, and Randy. They stare.

NARRATOR

We understood. Naturally. There was no other restaurant open on Christmas day, but it went deeper than that. But we understood.

79. EXT./INT. - CHINESE RESTAURANT - DUSK

79.

We hear a faint Chinese tune emanating from the restaurant. We are across the street looking in at the family. They are the only customers. The happy Chinese family hover around them. Two waiters, come marching out with a wilted potted palm dotted with a sad string of colored lights.

They are followed by a waiter carrying a tray bearing a large duck. The tray is placed before the family. We hear an exchange, then the Old Man begins to beam, the family digs in.

NARRATOR

That Christmas would live in our memories as the Christmas when we were introduced to Chinese turkey. All was right with the world.

DISSOLVE TO:

80. EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

80.

It nestles sleepily in the snow.

81. INT. RALPH'S BEDROOM - RALPH - NIGHT

81.

Lies awake, a smile on his face.

(CONTINUED)

81. CONTINUED

81.

NARRATOR

Next to me in the blackness
lay my oiled blue-steel beauty,
the greatest Christmas gift I
had ever received. Gradually
I drifted off to sleep, prancing
ducks on the wing and getting off
spectacular hip shots as I
dissolved into nothingness.

82. INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

82.

The lights are dim; only the Christmas tree glows, its icicles reflecting the multi colored bulbs. The gentle sounds of "Silent Night" swell softly from the Crosley Cathedral RADIO.

Mother has cleared away the last of the debris. She crosses the room to where the Old Man sits luxuriating in the glow of the wine and the moment. Mother stops and looks down at the Old Man. For these brief moments all is right with the world.

They look at one another with a oneness of satisfaction that comes rarely to any of us. It is a nice moment, simple, uncontrived and affecting. Mother sits beside the Old Man and their hands entwine and they share; no words are needed.

83. INT. RALPHIE'S BEDROOM

83.

The room is dark. We hear a faint sound like a BEEPING. CAMERA DOLLIES TOWARD the sound. We can make out a figure under the covers.

THE BEEPING SOUND gets louder. As we near the bed, Randy suddenly pops out from under the covers and looks around furtively and comically for a moment. Then he lifts his zeppelin from under the covers and whirls it through the air a couple of time, then ducks quickly beneath the blanket and continues his joyous journey with his magical zeppelin.

(CONTINUED)

83. CONTINUED

83.

CAMERA PANS SLOWLY OVER TO the sleeping Ralph. Ol' Blue lies across his chest. The strains of "Silent Night" float gently up to us.

CAMERA MOVES SLOWLY FROM Ralph's blissful face TO TAKE IN the crystal starlit night.

ROLL CREDITS.

THE END.