

ACT I

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A Christmas Story

OH
MOTHER
RALPHIE

(The lights in the house come down.)

RALPH. Three blocks away Schwartz was getting his—and for what may have been the first time in his life, he wasn't guilty. *(A pause)* You know, there has never been a kid who didn't know, deep in his heart, he'd die a horrible death or be stricken blind before he reached 21, and *then* they'd be sorry!

(RALPH points at the house as fantasy lights come up on the living room. MOTHER sits knitting and THE OLD MAN reads the newspaper.)

THE OLD MAN. What's for dinner tonight?

MOTHER. Meatloaf and red cabbage.

THE OLD MAN. Man, oh man! I love meatloaf and red cabbage!

(The doorbell rings.)

MOTHER. I'll get it. *(She rises, crosses to the door, opens it.)*
Why, it's Ralph!

THE OLD MAN *(puts down his paper and rises)*. Come on in, Ralph! Where ya been?

(RALPHIE enters wearing a long woolen coat, tightly buttoned down the front, a fedora and dark sunglasses. He taps out his path with a white cane, crossing to the center of the living room. "Hearts and Flowers", or something similar, sneaks in under the dialogue.)

THE OLD MAN. What is it, Ralph? What ... what happened?

MOTHER *(kneels down beside RALPHIE)*. Ralphie, what ... He's ... he's carrying a cane. *(Sudden horror as she realizes.)* Oh no! He can't see! He's blind!

(Music jumps in volume. THE OLD MAN crosses downstage and kneels on the other side of RALPHIE. RANDY comes from behind the couch and kneels in front of RALPHIE. MOTHER and THE OLD MAN sob and wail. The music drops back under the dialogue.)

THE OLD MAN. Blind! Ralph! What happened?

RALPHIE. No, I ... I can't tell you. It would cause ... too much pain.

THE OLD MAN. Pain? For who?

MOTHER. For us? *(RALPHIE turns away, biting his lip.)*
Was it something we did?

THE OLD MAN. Oh, Ralph, Ralph, what brought you to this lowly state?

MOTHER. It's our fault, isn't it? Please tell us, Ralph, no matter how it hurts! What did we do?

RALPHIE *(artificially noble)*. No, I ... I can't!

MOTHER. Oh, please, Ralph, I must know; what brought you to this ...

THE OLD MAN. Tell us, please.

MOTHER. Please. Please.

RALPHIE. It ... it was ...

MOTHER & THE OLD MAN *(ad-lib)*. Yes? Yes?

RALPHIE. Soap poisoning.

(A moment as their horrible crime sinks in, then a heart-breaking sobbing and keening.)

THE OLD MAN. How could we do it!?

RALPHIE. I'll manage to get along. Somehow.

THE OLD MAN. I told you not to use Lifebuoy!

MOTHER. I'll never forgive myself!

RALPHIE. Thanks, Mom.

THE OLD MAN. I feel awful!

(The lights on the living room fade with their sobbing. Light comes up on DL for RALPH.)

~~STOP~~