

hood, finally disappearing altogether. I ran into him years later at a class reunion. He wasn't nearly as big as I'd remembered. He tried to sell me life insurance. (*A pause.*) As my mother walked me home, I realized I was doomed! I had woven a tapestry of obscenity that hangs over Lake Michigan to this day like a black cloud, and my mother had heard it! I was prepared for another session with the Lifebuoy. But instead she cleaned me up and sent me to my room to lie down. Worn out by a day full of disappointment and dread, I fell fast asleep.

*(Lights up on the kitchen, living room and RALPHIE's bedroom. There is a new plant on the plant stand table. In the kitchen, the table is set for dinner. THE OLD MAN sits at his place, reading the paper.)*

MOTHER (*at the foot of the stairs*). Ralphie! Come down to dinner!

*(RALPHIE sits up quickly in bed.)*

RALPH. Dinner! That could mean only one thing: The Old Man was home! That was it! She'd been saving me for him! Now I was really gonna get it!

*(RALPH exits and his light goes out. MOTHER starts for the kitchen, stops at the couch.)*

MOTHER. Randy? You back there?

RANDY (*after a pause, unseen. He is crying*). Uh-huh.

MOTHER (*sits on the couch; then, gently*). What's the matter? Whatcha crying for?

RANDY. Daddy's gonna kill Ralphie!

MOTHER. No, he's not.

RANDY. Yes, he is, too!

MOTHER. No, he's not. I promise you. Daddy's not going to kill Ralphie. Now come on. Come on out. Let's eat dinner.

*(RANDY slowly rises from behind the couch. She pats the seat next to her. RANDY comes over the back of the couch, sits and hugs her. She puts her arms around him.)*

MOTHER *(cont'd)*. Tell you what, I'll promise you that Daddy won't kill Ralphie, if you'll stop crying, OK? OK? *(RANDY tries to stop crying. MOTHER pulls a handkerchief from her apron and wipes his nose.)* OK? *(RANDY nods.)* Good. Blow. *(He blows his nose.)* Now go sit at your place.

*(RANDY exits to the kitchen. RALPHIE comes down the stairs, crosses past MOTHER downstage, his head hanging low. As she starts a cross to the kitchen, there is a knock at the door. She crosses and opens it. It is ESTHER JANE.)*

ESTHER JANE. Mrs. Parker, may I come in?

MOTHER. We're getting ready for dinner, Esther Jane, maybe you could come b ...

ESTHER JANE. It'll just take a minute.

MOTHER. Of course. Come in.

ESTHER JANE *(entering, she holds out RALPHIE's glasses)*. I thought Ralph might need these. He dropped them when he ... when they were ...

MOTHER *(accepting glasses)*. Thank you, Esther Jane. Would you like to speak to him? He ...

ESTHER JANE. No, that's all right. Oh, did you see the spider he gave me? He drew my name for the gift exchange.

MOTHER. It's a very nice spider.

ESTHER JANE. Usually, I don't like spiders. *(Pause.)* Well, I'd better go. Merry Christmas, Mrs. Parker!

MOTHER. Merry Christmas, Esther Jane.