

RALPH. The Old Man's spare tires were actually only tires in the academic sense. They were round, they had been made of rubber. They had long ago been given extreme unction.

RANDY. I gotta go wee-wee!

MOTHER. You should have thought of that before. Ralphie, why don't you go help your father?

RALPHIE. Can I?

MOTHER. Yes. Just watch for traffic getting out.

*(RALPHIE gets out of the car.)*

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

THE OLD MAN. Whaddya doin' here?

RALPHIE. Mom said I should help.

THE OLD MAN. Oh! Oh, yeah?

RALPHIE. Yeah.

THE OLD MAN. Sit down here, then. Squat down. Here.

Hold this here. *(Hands the hubcap to RALPHIE, who holds it against his chest. THE OLD MAN twists off the lug nuts, then looks up.)* No, not that way. *(He paws at the hubcap.)*

Come on, come on. *(He rearranges the hubcap, so that RALPHIE is holding it horizontally.)* Hold it like this, see ... so I can put the lug nuts in it. *(The lug nuts clatter into the hubcap.)* Five of 'em. There ya go! *(THE OLD MAN rapidly jacks up the car.)* And ... we ... got it! *(He pulls off the flat, puts on the spare.)* There ...

*(As THE OLD MAN turns, lights cross fade to strobe. There is a long, low musical sting as, in slow motion, THE OLD MAN reaches for the lug nuts, accidentally catches the edge of the hubcap and snaps it upward. RALPHIE tries to recapture the lug nuts as they sail up into the air.)*

RALPH. For one brief moment I saw all five of the lug nuts silhouetted against the lights of the traffic!

RALPHIE. Ooooooooooh, fuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuudge!

RALPH. Only I didn't say fudge. I said *the* word. The big one. The "F" blank, blank, blank word!

*(Lights cross fade from strobe to previous reading.)*

THE OLD MAN. What did you say?

RALPHIE *(cringes, shrugs)*. Um ...

THE OLD MAN. That's what I *thought* you said. Get in the car. Go on!

*(RALPHIE climbs into the car as THE OLD MAN finds a couple of the lug nuts and quickly puts on the spare.)*

RALPH. I was dead. What would it be? The guillotine? The chair? The rack? Chinese water torture? Mere child's play compared to what surely awaited me. I climbed into the back seat next to my kid brother. He knew something was wrong, *I* knew something was wrong, my mother didn't have a clue.

MOTHER. Everything go all right?

*(THE OLD MAN puts the flat tire and jack into the trunk.)*

RALPH. She'd know soon and I'd be doomed. I had done something unspeakable. I was untouchable. Rotten to the core. I was never going to make it up the ladder of human virtues. I would be drummed out of the human race.

*(THE OLD MAN climbs back into the car. MOTHER holds up the watch.)*

MOTHER *(gloating)*. Six minutes.

THE OLD MAN. Do you know what your son just said?