

SCHWARTZ. This'll make it go really fast. Zoom!

FLICK. Whatchoo getting' for Christmas?

SCHWARTZ. Gilbert chemistry set.

FLICK. Yeah?

SCHWARTZ. Yeah! Y' get lotsa jars of special chemicals and a book that tells how to make stuff.

FLICK. What kinda stuff?

SCHWARTZ. Invisible ink, stuff that looks like blood, stink bombs.

FLICK. Stink bombs?

SCHWARTZ. Yeah, they got about ten kinds of stink bombs you can make.

FLICK. Wow!

SCHWARTZ. What're *you* gettin' for Christmas?

FLICK. Lionel train set.

SCHWARTZ. Like the one in Higbee's window?

FLICK (*with a nod*). Even gonna get that little house where the guy pops out, too.

SCHWARTZ. Oh, man!

*(RALPHIE enters the pool of light.)*

FLICK. Hey, Ralph! Bet you caught it when your dad got home last night, huh?

RALPHIE. Wasn't bad.

SCHWARTZ. What about that BB gun? You gonna get it or not?

RALPHIE. Guess not.

SCHWARTZ. Gee, Ralph, that's tough.

FLICK. Sorry, Ralph.

RALPHIE. Yeah, well ...

SCHWARTZ. Hey, ya wanna come sledding with us?

RALPHIE. No. You guys go ahead. Maybe I'll catch up later.

SCHWARTZ. Come on, Flick!

*(They exit. RALPHIE sits on the log. ESTHER JANE enters, carrying ice skates.)*

ESTHER JANE. Hello, Ralph.

RALPHIE. Oh ... hello.

ESTHER JANE. May I sit here?

RALPHIE. Um ... sure. *(She does.)* Thanks for, you know, bringing my glasses over.

ESTHER JANE. You're welcome. I just didn't want you to get in trouble. *(A pause. She seems to be building her courage. Finally, she pulls a square pink envelope from her coat and hands it to RALPHIE. Quickly, in one breath.)* Here's a Christmas card I got you. I got it myself. It's not from my parents. I bought it with my allowance. G'bye.

*(She exits quickly. RALPHIE watches after her, confused. He contemplates the card for a moment, then opens it. RALPH enters upstage of RALPHIE as he reads it.)*

RALPH. It was an expensive Christmas card. Esther Jane had spent more than a week's allowance on it. It was all flowers and doilies and bad poetry. Just the sort of card I'd never cared for. But for some reason I didn't mind this one so much. I even kind of liked it. *(RALPHIE smiles, stands and exits. RALPH crosses around the log and sits.)* Now, in our house we always opened one present on Christmas Eve. Other less fortunate people, I had heard, waited until Christmas morning before they were allowed to open anything. I always thought of our family as more civilized. Those great heaps of tissuey, crinkly, sparkly, enigmatic packages were a terrible temptation, half hidden among the folds of a white bed sheet snow bank under the tree. That one opened present on Christmas Eve helped relieve the pressure.