

RALPH. My father was one of the most feared Furnace Fighters in Northern Indiana.

THE OLD MAN. Somebody turned it down again! Who the hallelujah turned this Daniel Boone furnace down so low? (MOTHER looks guilty.) Open up the dog bone damper, will ya!

MOTHER. What?

THE OLD MAN. The damper! Open the dingblang fuzzle-whizzin' damper!

(MOTHER operates a slide switch on the wall near the basement door. RALPHIE has entered his room. He does not, of course, see RALPH, his future self. RALPHIE listens intently to THE OLD MAN's swearing, grabs his tablet and writes frantically.)



RALPH. Now, that was a new one. Just one of many in The Old Man's endless lexicon of curses. Realizing it might come in handy during a ball game or an argument with Schwartz, I made note of it for future use. (The smoke stops flowing. In the bedroom, RALPHIE opens a desk drawer.) For myself that Christmas, I wanted only one thing. I found the ad in a magazine called *Open Road for Boys*. (RALPHIE pulls out a copy of the magazine and opens it.) It was a magnificent thing of balanced copy, superb artwork and subtly contrived catch phrases. It said: "BOYS! at last YOU can own an OFFICIAL RED RYDER carbine action 200-shot RANGE MODEL AIR RIFLE!" (RALPH dons a cowboy hat and bandanna.) And there was a picture of Red Ryder himself, clutching the knurled stock of the most beautiful BB gun I'd ever laid eyes on. No self-respecting cowboy would be with-

out one. (The lights in RALPHIE's room change. We hear music: a guitar and harmonica. RALPH pulls a BB gun from nowhere, puts one foot up on a stool, and becomes a cowboy. RALPHIE does not see him, but keeps his eye on the ad, moving his lips and reacting to the words he is reading as RALPH says them.) Hey, pardner, this legendary official Red Ryder 200-Shot Carbine Action Range Model Air Rifle is just like the one Red Ryder uses when he's chasin' bad guys. It even has a compass built right into the stock, so you'll never get lost on the trail; and say, there's an official Red Ryder sundial for tellin' time in the wilderness, too! It's a real straight shooter! Y'just look down the barrel to the special cloverleaf sight, and pull the trigger. Y'can't miss.



RALPHIE. You can't miss!

RALPH. It's great fer shootin' targets and varmints; and, hey, pardner, tell Dad it makes a swell Christmas gift, too! Supplies are limited, though, so he'd better hurry over to yer local dealer right now. Y'don't wanna be left out.

RALPHIE. I don't want to be left out.

(RALPHIE tears the ad out of the magazine and exits as lights fade to black in the room. Lights come up full in the kitchen as THE OLD MAN enters from the basement, hanging the poker back on the hook.)

THE OLD MAN. I got it lit again.

MOTHER. How about the clinker?

THE OLD MAN (with the air of a warrior). Whipped that, too.