

RALPHIE (*finishes with a sigh of relief and a smile, holds up his masterpiece and reads*). "What I want for Christmas by Ralph Parker. What I want for Christmas is a legendary official Red Ryder carbine action 200-shot Range Model air rifle with a compass and this thing which tells time built right into the stock. It is a very good thing to get for Christmas. (*Pause.*) I don't think Tinker Toys are a very good Christmas present. Lincoln Logs aren't a good present, either. The end." (*He puts it down, writes. Reads.*) "P.S. Have a Merry Christmas, Miss Shields."

RALPH. A little sucking up couldn't hurt. (*Lights fade on RALPHIE.*) On Monday, I turned in my theme, knowing I was offering up a masterpiece. No doubt Miss Shields, in her ecstasy, would excuse me from theme writing for the rest of my life. Oh, how I wanted to be a fly on the wall, to witness that historic moment when she first laid eyes on what would be known in future as the ultimate "What I Want for Christmas" theme.

(*Lights down on RALPH, who exits. Fantasy lights come up in the classroom area. MISS SHIELDS, wearing a large, wide-brimmed feathered hat, sits behind her desk, which is covered with high, wobbling piles of themes. Wielding a red pencil the size of a child's leg, she pulls a theme from the top of the pile, wildly marks all over it with the pencil and moves it to a second pile as she speaks.*)

MISS SHIELDS. Margins! Margins! Margins! Why don't they listen? Why don't they learn? Semicolon, you dolt, not period! Oh, I can't take this anymore. But I must! It is my duty! One more! Just one more! (*Takes a theme from the top of the pile and reads.*) "Ralph Parker" (*Rolls her eyes.*) Ha! (*Reads silently. The overture from Tchaikovsky's "Romeo and Juliet" creeps in under.*) Why ... why ... this is ... good. This is

... it's wonderful! (*She clutches it to her bosom as the music swells.*) The theme I've been waiting for all my life! It validates my existence! The prose ... it ... it sings! " ... legendary official Red Ryder carbine action 200-shot Range Model air rifle with a compass and this thing which tells time build right into the stock!" Why, this isn't prose! It's poetry! Sheer poetry! I am transported! It out-Shakespeares Shakespeare! (*She stands and sweeps the stacks of themes from her desk.*) These are not worthy to be in such close proximity to this ... this ... masterpiece! Let the word go out, past is prologue! The history of theme writing begins here!

(*She turns and writes on the board, "Ralph Parker A+++++++", adding plusses until she runs out of blackboard. Streamers drop, confetti rains down and, to the sound of children cheering, RALPHIE comes into view from upstage of MISS SHIELDS' desk, climbing unseen steps like Patton mounting a rampart. He is dressed as Shakespeare, and is carrying an ostrich quill pen. He waves triumphantly to the teeming millions as MISS SHIELDS crosses downstage and plants herself below him, looking upward with hero worship in her eyes. RALPHIE stands, hands on hips, feet wide apart, lord of all he surveys, as the music fades, the lights come down. Classroom wagon moves out. RALPH's light comes up at the L proscenium.*)

RALPH. At the end of the school day I drifted home, secure in the knowledge that my plan was progressing. First, the barrage of ads; second, the addition of Miss Shields to the cause; and the third piece would fall into place that very evening.

(*Lights come up on living room. MOTHER and THE OLD MAN wear coats. She is buttoning RANDY's coat. THE OLD MAN is getting his hat from the coat rack. Christmas music under.*)