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BIG DOG PUBLISHING

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RALPH AND CLEO'S CRAZY CHRISTMAS

HOLIDAY. Abandoned by her family, Cleo the cat, hungry and cold, meets a beagle named Ralph who invites her in for a bit of food and a warm catnap. Even though Ralph is a self-professed cat hater, he soon takes a liking to Cleo and convinces his owner, Johnny, to adopt Cleo just in time for Christmas. But Cleo's luck runs out when a couple of dimwitted thieves petnap her and Ralph and hold them for ransom. Johnny must come up with the \$2,000 ransom by Christmas Eve or Cleo and Ralph will be dropped off at a dog food company to be made into doggie treats!

Performance Time: Approximately 45-60 minutes.

CHARACTERS

(3 M, 2 F, 1 flexible, opt. extras)

RALPH: Beagle who has been rescued from the streets; wears a dog costume with baggy shorts, a shirt, high-top sneakers, a Superman cape, and a baseball cap worn backwards; male.

CLEOPATRA "CLEO": Sophisticated purebred Siamese cat; her family has just moved to Arizona and has abandoned her; wears gray sweats and has whiskers; female.

JOHNNY MULDOON: Ralph's kind, mild-mannered owner; wears a shirt, slacks, jacket, and muffler.

GRACE PENDERTON: Johnny's girlfriend who works as a police officer; wears a police uniform and a long coat.

HARRY THE HAT: Drifter and thief; looks like a 1930s hood; wears a suit and tie and gray fedora.

SLUDGE FOGERTY: Dimwitted, petty thief who dreams of owning a flower shop; wears cutoffs, a loud shirt, sport shoes and socks, and a knit ski hat; flexible.

TV ANNOUNCER: Voiceover.

POLICE OFFICER: Voiceover.

WAITER: Non-speaking.

SETTING

Houston, TX. Johnny Muldoon's living room/kitchen.

SET

The living room SL has a sofa and an easy chair. Next to the sofa, there is a small table with a TV remote control and a "TV Guide" on it. There is a picture of Johnny, his mother, a poodle, and a glamour shot of Marilyn Monroe on the wall. The kitchen SR has a kitchen table with two chairs and a swinging door for the kitchen entry. There is a front door entry and a bedroom exit. There is a window with ruffled curtains above a pet door. Dog food and water dishes, a basket of dog toys, and a bag of Purina Senior dog food are on the floor in the kitchen.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Scene 1: Johnny's living room/kitchen.

Scene 2: Johnny's living room/kitchen, two hours later.

Scene 3: Restaurant, one hour later. There is a table set for two.

Scene 4: Johnny's living room/kitchen, one week later.

Scene 5: Johnny's living room/kitchen, later that night.

Scene 6: Restaurant, three days later.

Scene 7: Petnappers' living room, Christmas Eve. The living room is the same setup as Johnny's living room.

Scene 8: Johnny's living room/kitchen, 30 minutes later.

PROPS

Football	Garland
Basket for dog toys	Tinsel
Frisbee	Christmas tree lights
Dog food dish	Christmas tree
Dog water dish	2 Large cloth bags
Bag of Purina Senior dog food	Shopping bags
"TV Guide"	Box of chicken
Sofa pillows	Telephone
Blanket	Cell phone
TV remote control	Boxes
TV	Pet carriers
Christmas tree box	Clothes
Bright table cloth	Sheets
2 Menus	Whoopee cushion (or sound effect)
2 Water glasses	Rope
Cheap vase	Briefcase
Plastic flower	Money
Candle	Gun
Candle holder	2 Stuffed kittens
Piece of paper	Blanket
Box of Christmas ornaments	

SOUND EFFECTS

"Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree," or another suitable song	Beethoven's "Symphony No. 5 in C Minor," or another suitable song
Car starting and pulling away	"I'll Have a Blue Christmas Without You," or another suitable song
"Theme from the Pink Panther," or another suitable song	Blue and white lights
Clock ticking	Theme from "Superman," or another suitable song
"Theme from the Godfather," or another suitable song	"There's No Place Like Home for the Holidays," or another suitable song
"Sprach Zarathustra" (Theme from "2001: A Space Odyssey")	Kittens crying
"Deck the Halls," or another suitable song	"Merry Christmas Darling," or another suitable song
Phone rings	

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"I don't see much point
to puttin' all this junk
on an ol' tree
and then taking it all down
in a couple of weeks.

I got better use
for a tree than that."

-Ralph

SCENE 1

(AT RISE: Houston, TX, Johnny Muldoon's living room/kitchen. "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree" or another holiday song is heard. Ralph, a 5-year-old Beagle, rushes through the outside door. He is very excited since he has just been for his walk and has had an adventure. Ralph is wearing baggy shorts, a shirt, high-top sneakers, a Superman cape, and a baseball cap worn backwards.)

RALPH: (Calls.) Hurry up, Johnny Boy! Way to go. We'll do the back yard. You throw. I'll catch.

(Looking back, Ralph climbs over the sofa. Johnny enters, wearing a shirt, slacks, jacket, and muffler. Johnny throws a football to Ralph.)

JOHNNY: There you go, big boy. Now, will you give me a break?

(Ralph catches the football.)

RALPH: Score. Score. Score. Man, did you see that cat? I hate cats, but that was one cool cat. All spitting and scrooched up. I love it when they get scrooched up. Almost got my nose, the little hairball, but I was just too fast for it.

(Ralph is running on the sofa.)

JOHNNY: Will you get down? What's wrong with you? You know better than that.

(Ralph climbs down from the sofa as Johnny heads for the door.)

RALPH: Jeez, chill out. How about my pass on that attack? Ralph, the wonder dog! That's me, all right. I'm terrific. (Ralph runs to the toy basket and dumps it over. He rummages around and finds a Frisbee.) See this? I got my Frisbee. Nice

change from the ball. No good, huh? *(Ralph offers up another toy.)* Well, how about this? You dig this.

(Johnny is not taken in by Ralph's bid for attention.)

JOHNNY: Sorry, fella. Gotta run by the cleaners and do some Christmas shopping. Pick up a tree, you know? Be a good boy now, and I'll bring you home a surprise. How about that?

RALPH: It's Saturday!

JOHNNY: Might be a little late for the game, but I'll make it up to ya. *(Johnny pets Ralph on the head.)* I'm outta here. Keep the bears out of the yard, buddy.

(Johnny exits out the door as Ralph stands holding out his toy. The door slams shut. Ralph walks to the door. The sound of a car starting and pulling away is heard.)

RALPH: Mannnnnnnn. I hate it when he does that. Where's my ear scratch? And he's supposed to check my stuff before he goes anywhere. That's the deal. He checks me out; I guard the house. *(Rummages around in the toy box.)* And did I get my vitamin? No sir-reee. He has to pick up the dry cleaning...do a little Christmas shopping. Like I care. Never mind about me. He's supposed to think about all that kind of dog stuff—vitamins, cookies, baths. Well, forget baths. I hate baths. He's got some kinda slime that makes me stink for a week. *(Ralph checks out his food dish.)* And what's this? Not Purina Senior again? Where's my Kibbles and Bits? What do I look like anyway, a fat ol' yard dog waitin' to keel over? And no cookie?! He always leaves my cookie right by my dish. Well, that just tears it. What's got into him anyway? *(He heads for the sofa and appears frantic.)* Where's the remote? *(Searching, he tosses the pillows, the TV Guide and the blanket around until he finds the TV remote.)* Ah-ha. Almost time for [Jerry Springer] and Kung Fu reruns.

(Mocks Kung Fu moves.) Hi-Yah. Grasshopper. Man, I really dig all that violence. Too cool. *(Ralph picks up the TV Guide and checks it out.)* Too early. *(Clicks on the TV.)* Well, let's just check out the news and find the ol' spot. Kill a little time...catch a few ZZZZZZZZ's. *[Or insert the name of another TV show.]*

ANNOUNCER: *(Voiceover.)* This is a special announcement from Channel 2 News. Holiday pet nappers are scouring our neighborhoods again this year. According to Officer Grace Penderton, pets are being kidnapped and held for ransom. If your pet is missing and you are contacted regarding a ransom, please call Officer Penderton at the number posted on your screen.

RALPH: Maybe they'll nab that stuck-up Schnauzer down the street. I hope, I hope, I hope. *(Ralph clicks off the TV, then after circling three times, jumps up on the sofa, settles down, and goes back to sleep. Long pause. "The Theme from the Pink Panther" or another suitable song is heard. A corner of the dog door slowly begins to open and a head emerges. Slowly, Cleopatra, a female cat, in gray sweats and whiskers slides cautiously inside, being careful not to wake Ralph. Seeing Ralph sound asleep and feeling somewhat secure, she circles the room, and then heads for the food and water dishes. She's hungry. Suddenly, Ralph stretches (arms and legs stiff), opens one eye, yawns, and starts to sniff. Cleo sees him and makes a break for the door.)* What in the heck you doin' in here, ya mangy fleabag?

CLEO: *(Sniff.)* Just don't be getting yourself all worked up there, Snoopy. I'm just passing by. I wouldn't even considering staying.

RALPH: You're tellin' me, sister. Move yer bony butt outta here right now.

(Around the room they go with Ralph stalking Cleo.)

CLEO: Be careful. Watch out. Don't you dare touch me, you smelly old...old flea-bitten cur.

RALPH: *Cur? Me a cur? Very fancy-smancy for a beat-up mouser like yourself. Outta here, ya litter-box fuzz brain, before I make mincemeat outta ya.*

(Breathless, Cleo climbs up on a chair. Glaring at her, Ralph jumps back up on the sofa. Cleo begins to groom herself.)

CLEO: Are you going to calm down and act civilized, or what?

RALPH: Just till I catch my breath. Then I'm gonna tear you apart. *(Scratches his ear.)* Say, ain't you that fence-climbing night-screacher that lives down the street?

CLEO: I'm a registered Siamese, and I reside in this neighborhood, if that's what you're referring to. I just dropped in for ahhh...a rest.

RALPH: Well, rest your carcass someplace else.

CLEO: My, aren't we the gentleman?

(Ralph sniffs in Cleo's direction.)

RALPH: Say, I knows your family...got that kid who makes all the noise on them moto-wheels. And the blonde whiner. They moved two days ago. I chased the truck.

CLEO: We're all moving...to Arizona. But they forgot me in the rush. They'll be back as soon as they realize I'm missing.

(Ralph rises from the sofa and approaches Cleo.)

RALPH: Fat chance.

CLEO: And what do you mean by that coarse remark?

RALPH: I mean, I may be just a dumb ol' hound dog and all, but they dumped you, kiddo. Face it, you're a dumpee.

CLEO: That's absurd. I'm a pedigreed Siamese. They'd never dum—. Well, my family just adores me, and they wouldn't run off and leave me all alone for a single moment...on purpose, that is. Once they realize—

RALPH: *(In her face.)* Yada, yada, yada. Look around, fuzz-brain. You're here...they're there. It's the old S-P-C-A for you, toots.

CLEO: *(Almost hysterical.)* Oh, my heavens, what am I going to do?!

(Ralph chews on his arm like he has a flea and then crosses to the pictures on wall.)

RALPH: Hey, look, it's not the end of the world. I was a dumpee myself once, and look what I fell into. Man, I got me Johnny and a grandma. *(Points to picture.)* And Johnny's sister, Isabel... *(Pointing to picture of Marilyn Monroe.)* ...she's my aunt now, and she's got a snot-nosed poodle she calls Precious that's a sorta cousin. What kinda name is that? Precious? Always yippin' and snippin'. But all the same, I got family.

CLEO: If they don't come back for me, I just don't know what I'm going to do. I've never been on my own before. And I'm hungry.

RALPH: Well, hey, look, help yourself. *(Indicates food/water dish.)* My stuff's over there, such as it is. I ain't gonna bother you none.

(Cleo goes to the food dish and gobbles some food down all the while trying to act like a lady.)

CLEO: Oh, thank you so much. I was almost at my wits end. My name's Cleopatra. What's yours?

RALPH: Ralph. Ralph the Wonder Dog. You didn't happen to see any bears out there in the yard, did ya?

CLEO: Don't be ridiculous. There are no bears in this neighborhood.

RALPH: *(Puffed up.)* Not since I got here, there ain't. Okay, so, Cleo, what's the plan?

CLEO: I haven't got a plan...just wait around my house, I guess. I don't know what else to do. What did you do? I mean, when you were...dumped.

RALPH: Ahhhh, it was different for me. No offense intended here now, sweetheart, but I'm a dog, and dogs is just naturally smarter than cats and kin take care of themselves better.

CLEO: Right. And I assume you set out these dishes by yourself?

RALPH: Never you mind about that. *(Both settle down on the sofa now. Cleo starts to groom herself and Ralph scratches his ear.)* See, I was just a pup and put up in a yard without no one to look out for me. Oh, they shoved me a tin of food and gave me water from an old hose, but nobody paid me much attention. So's one day, I ups and digs myself a hole under the fence and hits the road.

(Cleo begins to "wash" her face.)

CLEO: Oh, my, how brave.

RALPH: Brave didn't have nothing to do with it, sister. It was kind of dumb, really, 'cause I runs out into a highway and gets myself took out by a car.

CLEO: You were hit by an automobile? Were you hurt bad? What did you do?

RALPH: Well, I was pretty bunged up, I can tell ya that. Had me a broken leg and was cut up some, but I dragged my sorry butt over to a gas station and holed up there.

CLEO: It's a wonder you weren't killed.

RALPH: Well, I know what it's like to need a friend, I can tell ya that. That's when Johnny found me. He was gettin' gas, and he spies me over by the dumpster. We just eyeballs each other for awhile, and, finally, he goes in to pay for the gas and then comes on over to me.

CLEO: He didn't just take you to the... *(Stage whisper.)* ...pound?

RALPH: Naaaah. He's a pretty good guy. Johnny picks me up real careful and hauls me over to the doc. He does a good job on me 'ceptin' I had to get "fixed," whatever that means.

CLEO: You were very lucky.

RALPH: And here I am, livin' like a king. Look, you ain't so bad for a cat. Why don't you stick around here for awhile. Johnny will get ya some of them Tender Vittles that cat's like. He's pretty good about stuff like that. Maybe we could go on down and check out your house after awhile...see what's going on. Whadaya say?

CLEO: Do you think it would be all right?

RALPH: Sure. Me and Johnny is pals. Look, Cleo, Johnny won't be back for awhile, and I'm gonna' have me a little snooze before "Kung Fu" comes on. Why don't you catch a little cat nap, and I'll keep one eye open...just in case. *(Both settle in on the sofa. Ralph yawns.)* Gosh, you ain't as bony as you look. In fact, you're gettin' on to be one fat cat, sister. Better cut down some.

CLEO: I'm not fat. I got pregnant.

RALPH: So what? I got allergies. The doc'll fix you right up. Pop a pill and no more scratching.

CLEO: Scratching doesn't have anything to do with it, bright boy.

RALPH: Whatever. Now you go on and sleep for awhile. Nothin' to worry about. Ralph the Wonder Dog is on the job.

CLEO: You know, for a dog, you aren't so bad yourself.

(Ralph and Cleo curl up and go to sleep. Blackout.)

SCENE 2

(AT RISE: *Johnny's living room/kitchen, two hours later. Clock ticking is heard. Cleo and Ralph are asleep on the sofa. Johnny enters carrying a Christmas tree box. Grace Penderton, a police officer, enters wearing a long coat that covers her police uniform.*)

JOHNNY: Come on in, Grace. Don't mind the dog. Doesn't know how to bite even if he does wake up. (*Johnny puts the box down.*) I'll find the stand for the tree and the box of junk to put on it. (*To Ralph.*) Hey, boy, a new tree. What do you say to that? (*To Grace.*) Maybe we could order a pizza. How about it?

(*At the word "pizza," Ralph leaps off the sofa.*)

RALPH: Pizza! Did I hear pizza? Way to go! (*Dances around.*)

Pizza, pizza, pizza!

JOHNNY: (*To Grace.*) Take off your coat.

(*Grace takes off her coat, revealing her police uniform.*)

RALPH: Wow! She's a cop.

CLEO: So what? We haven't done anything.

GRACE: (*To Johnny.*) What's the kitty's name?

JOHNNY: What kitty?

GRACE: The one on the sofa looking at you.

RALPH: (*To Cleo.*) Here we go. We're busted.

CLEO: Here I go, you mean.

JOHNNY: (*To Grace.*) I don't have a cat.

GRACE: You do now.

JOHNNY: That's impossible. (*Grace points to Cleo.*) Holy cow.

Where did that come from?

RALPH: Beats me.

(*Johnny crosses to Cleo and pets her.*)

JOHNNY: Hello there, missy? You get lost?

(Cleo purrs and rubs his arm.)

RALPH: *(To Cleo.)* That's it...keep it up. He's a sucker for that stuff.

JOHNNY: *(To Cleo.)* I hate to say this, kitty cat, but you have to be on your way. *(To Grace.)* She lives down the street. Oh, well, she used to live down the street. They moved.

(Johnny makes a move to pick up Cleo.)

RALPH: Oh, no, you don't!

(Ralph stands in front of Cleo, his arms out protecting her.)

JOHNNY: What's this? I don't get it. *(To Grace.)* He hates cats.

GRACE: Well, he doesn't hate this one. You may be the proud owner of a cat, John. And from the looks of her, maybe a pregnant one.

JOHNNY: Shoot. No wonder they moved and left her. Now what am I going to do?

(Protecting Cleo, Ralph curls up his lips and growls.)

GRACE: Looks like Ralph has already done it, and you're going to have to go along for the ride.

JOHNNY: *(To Ralph.)* This is only temporary, buddy. You hear? Just temporary. *(To Grace.)* Look, Grace, could you hang around here awhile while I run to the store? I don't know a thing about cats. Do I need a litter box?

GRACE: Wouldn't hurt.

JOHNNY: I gotta pick up some food, too. Maybe some of them Whiskers or something.

RALPH: *(To Cleo.)* See, I told you it was going to be okay.

CLEO: Do you think he could get me some Tender Vittles?
They're my favorite.

RALPH: Wouldn't be a bit surprised.

JOHNNY: I'll be back in a few minutes. Make yourself at home. Take care of the girls, Ralph. *(Ralph salutes. Johnny puts on his coat.)* I'll bring back a pizza. Maybe some Tender Vittles.

(Johnny exits. Ralph runs to dog door.)

RALPH: *(Shouts to Johnny.)* Everything but anchovies. *(Looks back at Cleo. Shouts to Johnny.)* Okay, half anchovies.

GRACE: Well, I'd say you two pulled that off with style. *(Ralph and Cleo high-five. Ralph runs over to Grace and flops down on his back for a belly rub.)* I suppose you're looking for a sucker to scratch your belly?

RALPH: You got it.

(Grace reaches down and scratches Ralph's belly. Immediately his right foot begins to thump the floor.)

CLEO: That's absolutely disgusting.

(Blackout.)

SCENE 3

(Spot up SL. A restaurant, one hour later. Living room is dark SR. Theme from the godfather or another suitable song is heard. There is a table set for two with a bright-colored tablecloth, menus, water glasses, a cheap vase holding a plastic flower, and a candle in a candle holder. Harry "the Hat" enters and sits at the table. Harry looks like a 1930's hood and is dressed in a suit and tie and wears a gray fedora is on his head. He signals for two drinks. A Waiter enters carrying two drinks. He serves Harry and then lights the candle on Harry's table. "Sprach Zarathustra" (Theme from "2001: A Space Odyssey") or another suitable song is heard. Sludge Fogerty enters looking like a lost soul. He is dressed in cutoffs, a loud shirt, sport shoes and socks, and a knit ski hat.)

HARRY: *(To Sludge.)* Psssst, Psssst. Sludge, Sludge, over here.

(Sludge crosses to Harry's table.)

SLUDGE: Harry "The Hat." How ya doin', man? Good to see ya.

HARRY: Likewise. Take a load off. What you been up too, Sludge?

(Sludge sits.)

SLUDGE: Not much. The heat's on in town. Guys like us have to take it easy. How's things cookin' for you?

HARRY: Same-o, same-o. You still runnin' hot cars to Mexico?

SLUDGE: When I can. But like I sez, things are slow. Took me a ride to El Paso last week, but nothin' shakin' down there either, so I figured I'd hole up there for awhile.

HARRY: Same here. But I got me a line on a sweet little caper that would be perfect for you and me. Can you keep it under your hat?

JACK: Sure. Ol' Sludge always has a deal under his hat.

(Harry removes his hat and moves his chair closer to Sludge.)

HARRY: Now, listen up. Slappy Sam and Big Nose Bennie had one sweet scam going for them until Big Nose got sent up last year.

SLUDGE: I heard. What happened to Slappy Sam?

HARRY: Beat it up to Detroit before the cops roused him.

SLUDGE: That a fact. Always liked Sam, but Big Nose kinda made me nervous.

HARRY: Big Nose made everybody nervous. But before he went up, he told me about the deal him and Slappy pulled off every year about this time.

SLUDGE: Yeah? Doin' what, Harry?

(Harry moves his chair even closer to Sludge.)

HARRY: Well, it seems Big Nose and Slappy was petnappers.

SLUDGE: They was what?

HARRY: Petnappers, stupid. They kidnapped people's cats and dogs over Christmas and held them for ransom.

SLUDGE: You gotta be kidding. Who'd pay good money to get back some four-legged, fur-faced yipper?

HARRY: Man, where you been? Pets is a billion dollar a year racket. People treat their pets like their kids—better than their kids. They even got clothes and health insurance for them now.

SLUDGE: They must be nuts or something, Harry.

HARRY: Well, be that as it may, ol' Slappy and Big Nose were pulling down a lot of bucks on this caper, and we can do the same thing. We're as smart as Slappy and Big Nose, ain't we? *(He looks at Sludge and he's not so sure.)*

SLUDGE: I don't know. Remember the time Slappy and Big Nose went out to Queens and —. Hey, what about the cops? Slappy and Big Nose got picked up.

HARRY: Fa-get-a-bout-it. This is different. Arrangements have been made. We can handle this.

SLUDGE: How?

HARRY: Simple. I already rented us a house in a good neighborhood and scouted out the place. You know, found out where all them stuck-up poodles and such live. Then we nap em'. Simple as that.

SLUDGE: So where's the cash come in?

HARRY: We calls the owners up and tells em' we want 2,000 bucks before they can have their little darlins back. We hole up in the house until the deal's made and the dough's in our pockets. Then we just tie the pooch to a mailbox, and we're outta there.

SLUDGE: And if they don't pay up?

HARRY: That's the beauty of this. It's a win-win situation. If they don't pay, we'll take the little hairy creeps to Doggie Treats Dog Food Company. The deal's all set.

SLUDGE: I thought they put horse meat in dog food...

(Harry pulls off Sludge's hat and smacks him with it.)

HARRY: Why do you think they call it dog food, you dope?

SLUDGE: Gee, I never thought of that, Harry.

HARRY: Well, I got the house all set up. Cages, litter, kibbles and junk like that. So, are we in business? What do you say?

SLUDGE: Okay, Harry, I'm in. But we ain't gonna' hurt no dogs or cats, are we? I ain't gonna' hurt no dogs or cats.

HARRY: Don't be a creep. Of course not. We're just gonna take 'em on a little vacation for a coupla days. Then they can go home. That okay with you?

SLUDGE: Yeah, that's okay. An' I ain't takin' no dogs to them dog food guys.

HARRY: You don't have to worry about nothin'. I'll take care of everything. *(Harry gets up to leave and picks up his hat.)* I'll get the old ball rollin' tomorrow then. Okay with you?

SLUDGE: I guess so, Harry.

(Harry hands Sludge a piece of paper.)

HARRY: Here's the address. Startin' tomorrow, we're in business. And, Sludge, just think about all this as some sort of "Christmas club."

(Harry exits to "the theme from the godfather" or another suitable song. Lights down. Sludge blows out the candle.)

SCENE 4

(AT RISE: Johnny's living room/kitchen, one week later. "Deck the halls" or another suitable holiday song is heard. Ralph and Cleo are asleep on the sofa. Johnny enters, carrying a box of Christmas ornaments. Grace enters dragging some garland.)

JOHNNY: Okay, everyone, look alive. *(Ralph and Cleo awaken.)* We've got lights. We've got ornaments. We've got tinsel and garland. *(Ralph runs and picks up the garland.)* Ralph, don't eat the garland.

(Ralph sniffs the Christmas tree box.)

RALPH: *(To Cleo.)* I don't see much point to puttin' all this junk on an ol' tree and then taking it all down in a couple of weeks. *(Lifts his leg.)* I got better use of a tree than that.

(Cleo is sitting on the sofa grooming herself.)

CLEO: Oh, don't be so tiresome. These are the best things about Christmas...putting up the tree, wrapping the presents.

RALPH: Presents?

CLEO: Certainly. Everyone gets a Christmas present...even you, Scrooge.

(Grace tries to untangle the lights.)

GRACE: *(To Johnny.)* This is going to be fun. I'll start getting these lights straightened out, and when I'm finished, I'll serve refreshments. I brought eggnog and cookies.

JOHNNY: Boy, that sounds great. The tinsel is my favorite part. I put it on one piece at time.

(Johnny throws a piece of tinsel on Grace.)

RALPH: Tell us about it. What's this eggnog stuff?

CLEO: Oh, Ralph, it's so good. It's better than cream.

RALPH: Better than root beer?

JOHNNY: *(To Grace.)* Have I got any root beer?

GRACE: I'll look. You and Ralph can have that instead of eggnog, if you'd rather.

RALPH: I'd rather. That eggnog stuff sounds like it's for sissies.

(Grace picks up a strand of lights.)

GRACE: Here we go with the lights.

RALPH: And I got the garland.

JOHNNY: Ralph, I said don't chew on the garland. Stay away from it.

CLEO: I'll help with it.

(Cleo picks up the garland and moves toward Johnny.)

RALPH: How come she gets to help?

GRACE: *(To Johnny.)* I thought Cleo was only going to stay a couple of days.

JOHNNY: I thought so, too, but she and Ralph get along so well, I figured there's no harm in letting her stay awhile. Besides, she's a good little kitty.

(Cleo snuggles Johnny's leg. Ralph picks up his football and tosses it up and down.)

GRACE: What about her being pregnant?

JOHNNY: Oh, that. It'll work itself out in time.

GRACE: They didn't come back for her, huh?

CLEO: Meeoooooow.

(Cleo crosses to the sofa.)

JOHNNY: Nope. And I don't think they will. I walked on down there the other day, and I noticed they took the "For Sale" sign down. Leased it to an out-of-town family.

RALPH: Family? *(Ralph runs to look out of the window.)*

GRACE: Family?

JOHNNY: Well, I think it's a family. I saw the guy. Business suit, wearing a fedora. He rented the house, and I hope his family will be here before Christmas.

GRACE: I hope so, too. Christmas is a time for families to be together.

RALPH: *(Hopefully.)* They got a dog?

GRACE: Maybe they'll even have a dog for Ralph to play with and a kitty for Cleo.

(Ralph scratches his ear.)

RALPH: No cats.

CLEO: I beg your pardon.

RALPH: I hate cats.

CLEO: Oh, you do, do you? *(Throws a pillow at him.)* You contemptible lout.

(Ralph crosses to the sofa.)

RALPH: All except you, Cleo. You're the coolest cat around.

CLEO: I accept your apology.

(Blackout.)

SCENE 5

(AT RISE: Johnny's living room, later that night. Clock ticking is heard. Johnny and Grace are getting ready to go Christmas shopping. Ralph and Cleo are napping. Grace and Johnny's coats are on the sofa and the tree is aglow.)

JOHNNY: Wake up, you two. Grace and I are going Christmas shopping. You two better be good, or Santa won't come to visit you.

RALPH: Will you get off it?

(Cleo rises and stretches.)

CLEO: Will you please grow up? Christmas is fun. I always get a toy with catnip in it. And a year ago, I received a scratch tree. It was heaven.

RALPH: I could use a new ball mitt, and my Frisbee is getting kinda beat up.

(Grace and Johnny start to put on their coats.)

GRACE: *(To Johnny.)* I just love Christmas. Even being a police officer is fun at Christmas. Everyone is in such good spirits.

JOHNNY: Except for Ralph. He's his own grumpy self.

GRACE: Come on, these two can take care of themselves while we're at the mall. Pick up your shoes, so Ralph doesn't get them.

(Johnny picks up his shoes and places them on the table. He and Grace start to exit.)

JOHNNY: Be good, you guys, and, Ralph, don't chew up the "TV Guide."

RALPH: So, go already. I want to watch "Survivors." They're going to eat a rat tonight. How about you, Cleo? Could you eat a rat?

CLEO: Me? I'm a rat cat. I can catch a mouse faster than a dust mite. You should come mousing with me sometime.

RALPH: Not me. I got no time for mice. Bears, maybe. No mice.

JOHNNY: Come on, Grace, let's go. *(Looking her over.)* You know, for a cop, you're kinda cute.

CLEO: *(Calls.)* Don't forget the catnip.

(Johnny and Grace exit. Ralph and Cleo flop on the sofa and Ralph picks up the remote. Harry and Sludge, carrying two large cloth bags, sneak up on the house. They go backstage so they can enter through the kitchen doors. A loud noise is heard.)

RALPH: *(Startled.)* What's that?

(Cleo looks up.)

CLEO: What's what?

RALPH: That noise.

CLEO: A bear, no doubt.

(A loud noise is heard.)

RALPH: Quiet! I think someone's in the garage. *(Listens.)* Good grief, I think there's someone in the garage! *(The kitchen door opens, and Harry and Sludge enter. Shouts.)* Run, Cleo! Run for your life! *(Ralph hides behind the chair.)*

HARRY: Okay, doggie, you just stay cool, and you and me ain't gonna have no trouble. Like nobody's gonna get hurt here. Sludge, throw me a bag.

(Sludge throws Harry a bag and it hits him in the face.)

SLUDGE: This is gonna be a cinch. That mutt's afraid of his own shadow. *(Sludge opens up one of the bags and starts for Ralph. Cleo goes into action. She flies at Sludge wrapping her arms about his head and her legs around his middle, screeching and howling.)* Get offa me, you lousy cat. Owwww, you're clawing me. Do something, Harry!

HARRY: Hold still. I'm coming. Hold on there. I got the other bag.

SLUDGE: Get off, you stupid cat. That hurts. *(Cleo and Sludge whirl about the room with Sludge trying to get Cleo in the bag.)* Yeooooow, you're killin' me. You bit me, you...you—.

CLEO: I'll teach you to come house robbing, you filthy thief. Get out of here, or I'll cut you a new cheekbone.

RALPH: *(Shouts.)* Get offa him, Cleo! You're gonna get hurt!

(Cleo continues spitting and screeching as Sludge howls in pain.)

CLEO: Put down that sack, scumbag, before I scratch your eyes out. There, take that, you low-down pile of...parrot poop.

(Jack rolls Cleo off his back, and she topples to the floor.)

SLUDGE: She's down, Harry. Quick, get the bag! *(Harry opens the bag and struggles to get Cleo into it. Sludge slowly approaches Ralph with the second bag.)* Now for you, doggie boy.

(Ralph backs away.)

RALPH: No, not me. You ain't gonna stuff me in that bag. Cleo, help! *(Ralph runs to the TV.)* Look, take the TV. *(Runs to kitchen doors.)* I'll show you where the silver is. *(Runs to his toy box.)* Take my ball. *(Sludge and Harry grab Ralph and stuff him into the bag. We can see him struggle inside the bag. Pleads.)* Let me out. It's dark in here!

HARRY: Let's get out of here fast before they come back.

(Lights down as Harry and Sludge drag Ralph and Cleo offstage in the bags. Lights up. Empty living room. Johnny and Grace enter. Johnny is carrying shopping bags and Grace is carrying a box of chicken.)

JOHNNY: We're home. Come on out, guys. We've got chicken.

(No reply.)

GRACE: Come on, Cleo. Come on, girl. Get some chicken before Ralph eats it all up.

(No reply.)

JOHNNY: They must be out in the yard. *(Johnny puts down the packages, crosses to the window, and looks outside. Grace places the chicken box on the table.)* Nope, not in the yard.

(Grace crosses to the bedroom door.)

GRACE: I'll take the bedroom. They sleep on the bed when we're gone. *(Looks in. Calls.)* Come on, Ralphie Boy, you in there? I've got treats for you, big boy. *(To Johnny.)* No sign of them. Where could they be? *(Turns back.)* You don't think Cleo's family...?

JOHNNY: Naaah. They're around the neighborhood. They're out there prowling around. *(Phone rings. Johnny answers it. Into phone.)* Hello...Yes. This is John Muldoon...Who is this?...What are you talking about?...Two thousand dollars. Are you crazy? I don't have that kind of money...Who are you?...Listen, you creep, you better— *(Looks at the phone.)* They got em'. *(Johnny puts the phone down.)*

GRACE: Who?

JOHNNY: The petnappers—the ones on TV.

GRACE: So? What's going on?

JOHNNY: Ralph and Cleo. They've been napped.

(Beethoven's "Symphony No. 5 in C Minor" or something equally dramatic is heard. Blackout.)

[END OF FREEVIEW]