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NINE STORIES

FRANNY AND ZOOEY

RAISE HIGH THE ROOF BEAM, CARPENTERS  
AND SEYMOUR: AN INTRODUCTION

# THE CATCHER IN THE RYE



J. D. SALINGER



NEW YORK BOSTON

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To  
My Mother

IF YOU REALLY want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth. In the first place, that stuff bores me, and in the second place, my parents would have about two hemorrhages apiece if I told anything pretty personal about them. They're quite touchy about anything like that, especially my father. They're *nice* and all—I'm not saying that—but they're also touchy as hell. Besides, I'm not going to tell you my whole goddam autobiography or anything. I'll just tell you about this madman stuff that happened to me around last Christmas just before I got pretty run-down and had to come out here and take it easy. I mean that's all I told D.B. about, and he's my *brother* and all. He's in Hollywood. That isn't too far from this crumby place, and he comes over and visits me practically every week end. He's going to drive me home when I go home next month maybe. He just got a Jaguar. One of those little English jobs that can do around two hundred miles an hour. It cost him damn near four thousand bucks. He's got a lot of dough, now. He didn't *use* to. He used to be just a regular writer, when he was home. He wrote this terrific book of short stories, *The Secret Goldfish*, in case you never heard of him. The best one in it was "The Secret Goldfish." It was about

this little kid that wouldn't let anybody look at his goldfish because he'd bought it with his own money. It killed me. Now he's out in Hollywood, D.B., being a prostitute. If there's one thing I hate, it's the movies. Don't even mention them to me.

Where I want to start telling is the day I left Pencey Prep. Pencey Prep is this school that's in Agerstown, Pennsylvania. You probably heard of it. You've probably seen the ads, anyway. They advertise in about a thousand magazines, always showing some hot-shot guy on a horse jumping over a fence. Like as if all you ever did at Pencey was play polo all the time. I never even once saw a horse anywhere *near* the place. And underneath the guy on the horse's picture, it always says: "Since 1888 we have been molding boys into splendid, clear-thinking young men." Strictly for the birds. They don't do any damn more *molding* at Pencey than they do at any other school. And I didn't know anybody there that was splendid and clear-thinking and all. Maybe two guys. If that many. And they probably *came* to Pencey that way.

Anyway, it was the Saturday of the football game with Saxon Hall. The game with Saxon Hall was supposed to be a very big deal around Pencey. It was the last game of the year, and you were supposed to commit suicide or something if old Pencey didn't win. I remember around three o'clock that afternoon I was standing way the hell up on top of Thomsen Hill, right next to this crazy cannon that was in the Revolutionary War and all. You could see the whole field from there, and you could see the two teams bashing each other all over the place. You couldn't see the grandstand too hot, but you could hear them all yelling, deep and terrific on the Pencey side, because practically the whole school except me was there, and scrawny and faggy on the Saxon Hall side, because the visiting team hardly ever brought many people with them.

There were never many girls at all at the football games. Only seniors were allowed to bring girls with them. It was a terrible school, no matter how you looked at it. I like to be somewhere at least where you can see a few girls around once in a while, even if they're only scratching their arms or blowing their noses or even just giggling or something. Old Selma Thurmer—she was the headmaster's daughter—showed up at the games quite often, but she wasn't exactly the type that drove you mad with desire. She was a pretty nice girl, though. I sat next to her once in the bus from Agerstown and we sort of struck up a conversation. I liked her. She had a big nose and her nails were all bitten down and bloody-looking and she had on those damn falsies that point all over the place, but you felt sort of sorry for her. What I liked about her, she didn't give you a lot of horse manure about what a great guy her father was. She probably knew what a phony slob he was.

The reason I was standing way up on Thomsen Hill, instead of down at the game, was because I'd just got back from New York with the fencing team. I was the goddam manager of the fencing team. Very big deal. We'd gone in to New York that morning for this fencing meet with McBurney School. Only, we didn't have the meet. I left all the foils and equipment and stuff on the goddam subway. It wasn't all my fault. I had to keep getting up to look at this map, so we'd know where to get off. So we got back to Pencey around two-thirty instead of around dinnertime. The whole team ostracized me the whole way back on the train. It was pretty funny, in a way.

The other reason I wasn't down at the game was because I was on my way to say good-by to old Spencer, my history teacher. He had the grippe, and I figured I probably wouldn't see him again till Christmas vacation started. He wrote me this note saying

#### 4 *The Catcher in the Rye*

he wanted to see me before I went home. He knew I wasn't coming back to Pencey.

I forgot to tell you about that. They kicked me out. I wasn't supposed to come back after Christmas vacation, on account of I was flunking four subjects and not applying myself and all. They gave me frequent warning to start applying myself—especially around mid-terms, when my parents came up for a conference with old Thurmer—but I didn't do it. So I got the ax. They give guys the ax quite frequently at Pencey. It has a very good academic rating, Pencey. It really does.

Anyway, it was December and all, and it was cold as a witch's teat, especially on top of that stupid hill. I only had on my reversible and no gloves or anything. The week before that, somebody'd stolen my camel's-hair coat right out of my room, with my fur-lined gloves right in the pocket and all. Pencey was full of crooks. Quite a few guys came from these very wealthy families, but it was full of crooks anyway. The more expensive a school is, the more crooks it has—I'm not kidding. Anyway, I kept standing next to that crazy cannon, looking down at the game and freezing my ass off. Only, I wasn't watching the game too much. What I was really hanging around for, I was trying to feel some kind of a good-by. I mean I've left schools and places I didn't even know I was leaving them. I hate that. I don't care if it's a sad good-by or a bad good-by, but when I leave a place I like to *know* I'm leaving it. If you don't, you feel even worse.

I was lucky. All of a sudden I thought of something that helped make me know I was getting the hell out. I suddenly remembered this time, in around October, that I and Robert Tichener and Paul Campbell were chucking a football around, in front of the academic building. They were nice guys, especially Tichener. It was just before dinner and it was getting pretty dark out, but we kept chucking the ball around anyway. It kept getting darker and darker, and we could hardly

#### 5 *The Catcher in the Rye*

see the ball any more, but we didn't want to stop doing what we were doing. Finally we had to. This teacher that taught biology, Mr. Zambesi, stuck his head out of this window in the academic building and told us to go back to the dorm and get ready for dinner. If I get a chance to remember that kind of stuff, I can get a good-by when I need one—at least, most of the time I can. As soon as I got it, I turned around and started running down the other side of the hill, toward old Spencer's house. He didn't live on the campus. He lived on Anthony Wayne Avenue.

I ran all the way to the main gate, and then I waited a second till I got my breath. I have no wind, if you want to know the truth. I'm quite a heavy smoker, for one thing—that is, I used to be. They made me cut it out. Another thing, I *grew* six and a half inches last year. That's also how I practically got t.b. and came out here for all these goddam checkups and stuff. I'm pretty healthy, though.

Anyway, as soon as I got my breath back I ran across Route 204. It was icy as hell and I damn near fell down. I don't even know what I was running for—I guess I just felt like it. After I got across the road, I felt like I was sort of disappearing. It was that kind of a crazy afternoon, terrifically cold, and no sun out or anything, and you felt like you were disappearing every time you crossed a road.

Boy, I rang that doorbell fast when I got to old Spencer's house. I was really frozen. My ears were hurting and I could hardly move my fingers at all. "C'mon, c'mon," I said right out loud, almost, "somebody open the *door*." Finally old Mrs. Spencer opened it. They didn't have a maid or anything, and they always opened the door themselves. They didn't have too much dough.

"Holden!" Mrs. Spencer said. "How lovely to see you! Come in, dear! Are you frozen to death?" I think

she was glad to see me. She liked me. At least, I think she did.

Boy, did I get in that house fast. "How are you, Mrs. Spencer?" I said. "How's Mr. Spencer?"

"Let me take your coat, dear," she said. She didn't hear me ask her how Mr. Spencer was. She was sort of deaf.

She hung up my coat in the hall closet, and I sort of brushed my hair back with my hand. I wear a crew cut quite frequently and I never have to comb it much. "How've you been, Mrs. Spencer?" I said again, only louder, so she'd hear me.

"I've been just fine, Holden." She closed the closet door. "How have *you* been?" The way she asked me, I knew right away old Spencer'd told her I'd been kicked out.

"Fine," I said. "How's Mr. Spencer? He over his gripe yet?"

"Over it! Holden, he's behaving like a perfect—I don't know *what* . . . He's in his room, dear. Go right in."

## 2

THEY EACH had their own room and all. They were both around seventy years old, or even more than that. They got a bang out of things, though—in a half-assed way, of course. I know that sounds mean to say, but I don't mean it mean. I just mean that I used to think about old Spencer quite a lot, and if you thought about him *too* much, you wondered what the heck he was still living for. I mean he was all stooped over, and he had very terrible posture, and in class, whenever he dropped a piece of chalk at the blackboard, some guy

in the first row always had to get up and pick it up and hand it to him. That's awful, in my opinion. But if you thought about him just enough and not *too* much, you could figure it out that he wasn't doing too bad for himself. For instance, one Sunday when some other guys and I were over there for hot chocolate, he showed us this old beat-up Navajo blanket that he and Mrs. Spencer'd bought off some Indian in Yellowstone Park. You could tell old Spencer'd got a big bang out of buying it. That's what I mean. You take somebody old as hell, like old Spencer, and they can get a big bang out of buying a blanket.

His door was open, but I sort of knocked on it anyway, just to be polite and all. I could see where he was sitting. He was sitting in a big leather chair, all wrapped up in that blanket I just told you about. He looked over at me when I knocked. "Who's that?" he yelled. "Caulfield? Come in, boy." He was always yelling, outside class. It got on your nerves sometimes.

The minute I went in, I was sort of sorry I'd come. He was reading the *Atlantic Monthly*, and there were pills and medicine all over the place, and everything smelled like Vicks Nose Drops. It was pretty depressing. I'm not too crazy about sick people, anyway. What made it even more depressing, old Spencer had on this very sad, ratty old bathrobe that he was probably born in or something. I don't much like to see old guys in their pajamas and bathrobes anyway. Their bumpy old chests are always showing. And their legs. Old guys' legs, at beaches and places, always look so white and un hairy. "Hello, sir," I said. "I got your note. Thanks a lot." He'd written me this note asking me to stop by and say good-by before vacation started, on account of I wasn't coming back. "You didn't have to do all that. I'd have come over to say good-by anyway."

"Have a seat there, boy," old Spencer said. He meant the bed.

I sat down on it. "How's your grippe, sir?"

"M'boy, if I felt any better I'd have to send for the doctor," old Spencer said. That knocked him out. He started chuckling like a madman. Then he finally straightened himself out and said, "Why aren't you down at the game? I thought this was the day of the big game."

"It is. I was. Only, I just got back from New York with the fencing team," I said. Boy, his bed was like a rock.

He started getting serious as hell. I knew he would. "So you're leaving us, eh?" he said.

"Yes, sir. I guess I am."

He started going into this nodding routine. You never saw anybody nod as much in your life as old Spencer did. You never knew if he was nodding a lot because he was thinking and all, or just because he was a nice old guy that didn't know his ass from his elbow.

"What did Dr. Thurmer say to you, boy? I understand you had quite a little chat."

"Yes, we did. We really did. I was in his office for around two hours, I guess."

"What'd he say to you?"

"Oh . . . well, about Life being a game and all. And how you should play it according to the rules. He was pretty nice about it. I mean he didn't hit the ceiling or anything. He just kept talking about Life being a game and all. You know."

"Life is a game, boy. Life is a game that one plays according to the rules."

"Yes, sir. I know it is. I know it."

Game, my ass. Some game. If you get on the side where all the hot-shots are, then it's a game, all right—I'll admit that. But if you get on the *other* side, where there aren't any hot-shots, then what's a game about it? Nothing. No game. "Has Dr. Thurmer written to your parents yet?" old Spencer asked me.

"He said he was going to write them Monday."

"Have you yourself communicated with them?"

"No, sir, I haven't communicated with them, because I'll probably see them Wednesday night when I get home."

"And how do you think they'll take the news?"

"Well . . . they'll be pretty irritated about it," I said. "They really will. This is about the fourth school I've gone to." I shook my head. I shake my head quite a lot. "Boy!" I said. I also say "Boy!" quite a lot. Partly because I have a lousy vocabulary and partly because I act quite young for my age sometimes. I was sixteen then, and I'm seventeen now, and sometimes I act like I'm about thirteen. It's really ironical, because I'm six foot two and a half and I have gray hair. I really do. The one side of my head—the right side—is full of millions of gray hairs. I've had them ever since I was a kid. And yet I still act sometimes like I was only about twelve. Everybody says that, especially my father. It's partly true, too, but it isn't *all* true. People always think something's *all* true. I don't give a damn, except that I get bored sometimes when people tell me to act my age. Sometimes I act a lot older than I am—I really do—but people never notice it. People never notice anything.

Old Spencer started nodding again. He also started picking his nose. He made out like he was only pinching it, but he was really getting the old thumb right in there. I guess he thought it was all right to do because it was only me that was in the room. I didn't *care*, except that it's pretty disgusting to watch somebody pick their nose.

Then he said, "I had the privilege of meeting your mother and dad when they had their little chat with Dr. Thurmer some weeks ago. They're grand people."

"Yes, they are. They're very nice."

Grand. There's a word I really hate. It's a phony. I could puke every time I hear it.

Then all of a sudden old Spencer looked like he had something very good, something sharp as a tack, to say to me. He sat up more in his chair and sort of moved around. It was a false alarm, though. All he did was lift the *Atlantic Monthly* off his lap and try to chuck it on the bed, next to me. He missed. It was only about two inches away, but he missed anyway. I got up and picked it up and put it down on the bed. All of a sudden then, I wanted to get the hell out of the room. I could feel a terrific lecture coming on. I didn't mind the idea so much, but I didn't feel like being lectured to and smell Vicks Nose Drops and look at old Spencer in his pajamas and bathrobe all at the same time. I really didn't.

It started, all right. "What's the matter with you, boy?" old Spencer said. He said it pretty tough, too, for him. "How many subjects did you carry this term?"

"Five, sir."

"Five. And how many are you failing in?"

"Four." I moved my ass a little bit on the bed. It was the hardest bed I ever sat on. "I passed English all right," I said, "because I had all that Beowulf and Lord Randal My Son stuff when I was at the Whooton School. I mean I didn't have to do any work in English at all hardly, except write compositions once in a while."

He wasn't even listening. He hardly ever listened to you when you said something.

"I flunked you in history because you knew absolutely nothing."

"I know that, sir. Boy, I know it. You couldn't help it."

"Absolutely nothing," he said over again. That's something that drives me crazy. When people say something twice that way, after you *admit* it the first time. Then he said it *three* times. "But absolutely nothing. I doubt very much if you opened your textbook

even once the whole term. Did you? Tell the truth, boy."

"Well, I sort of glanced through it a couple of times," I told him. I didn't want to hurt his feelings. He was mad about history.

"You glanced through it, eh?" he said—very sarcastic. "Your, ah, *exam* paper is over there on top of my chiffonier. On top of the pile. Bring it here, please."

It was a very dirty trick, but I went over and brought it over to him—I didn't have any alternative or anything. Then I sat down on his cement bed again. Boy, you can't imagine how sorry I was getting that I'd stopped by to say good-bye to him.

He started handling my exam paper like it was a turd or something. "We studied the Egyptians from November 4th to December 2nd," he said. "You *chose* to write about them for the optional essay question. Would you care to hear what you had to say?"

"No, sir, not very much," I said.

He read it anyway, though. You can't stop a teacher when they want to do something. They just *do* it.

The Egyptians were an ancient race of Caucasians residing in one of the northern sections of Africa. The latter as we all know is the largest continent in the Eastern Hemisphere.

I had to sit there and *listen* to that crap. It certainly was a dirty trick.

The Egyptians are extremely interesting to us today for various reasons. Modern science would still like to know what the secret ingredients were that the Egyptians used when they wrapped up dead people so that their faces would not rot for innumerable centuries. This interesting riddle is still quite a challenge to modern science in the twentieth century.

He stopped reading and put my paper down. I was beginning to sort of hate him. "Your essay, shall we



say, ends there," he said in this very sarcastic voice. You wouldn't think such an old guy would be so sarcastic and all. "However, you dropped me a little note, at the bottom of the page," he said.

"I know I did," I said. I said it very fast because I wanted to stop him before he started reading *that* out loud. But you couldn't stop him. He was hot as a fire-cracker.

DEAR MR. SPENCER [he read out loud]. That is all I know about the Egyptians. I can't seem to get very interested in them although your lectures are very interesting. It is all right with me if you flunk me though as I am flunking everything else except English anyway. Respectfully yours, HOLDEN CAULFIELD.

He put my goddam paper down then and looked at me like he'd just beaten hell out of me in ping-pong or something. I don't think I'll ever forgive him for reading me that crap out loud. I wouldn't've read it out loud to *him* if *he'd* written it—I really wouldn't. In the first place, I'd only *written* that damn note so that he wouldn't feel too bad about flunking me.

"Do you blame me for flunking you, boy?" he said.

"No, sir! I certainly don't," I said. I wished to hell he'd stop calling me "boy" all the time.

He tried chucking my exam paper on the bed when he was through with it. Only, he missed again, naturally. I had to get up again and pick it up and put it on top of the *Atlantic Monthly*. It's *boring* to do that every two minutes.

"What would you have done in my place?" he said. "Tell the truth, boy."

Well, you could see he really felt pretty lousy about flunking me. So I shot the bull for a while. I told him I was a real moron, and all that stuff. I told him how I would've done exactly the same thing if I'd been in his place, and how most people didn't appreciate how

tough it is being a teacher. That kind of stuff. The old bull.

The funny thing is, though, I was sort of thinking of something else while I shot the bull. I live in New York, and I was thinking about the lagoon in Central Park, down near Central Park South. I was wondering if it would be frozen over when I got home, and if it was, where did the ducks go. I was wondering where the ducks went when the lagoon got all icy and frozen over. I wondered if some guy came in a truck and took them away to a zoo or something. Or if they just flew away.

I'm lucky, though. I mean I could shoot the old bull to old Spencer and think about those ducks at the same time. It's funny. You don't have to think too hard when you talk to a teacher. All of a sudden, though, he interrupted me while I was shooting the bull. He was always interrupting you.

"How do you *feel* about all this, boy? I'd be very interested to know. Very interested."

"You mean about my flunking out of Pencey and all?" I said. I sort of wished he'd cover up his bumpy chest. It wasn't such a beautiful view.

"If I'm not mistaken, I believe you also had some difficulty at the Whooton School and at Elkton Hills." He didn't say it just sarcastic, but sort of nasty, too.

"I didn't have too much difficulty at Elkton Hills," I told him. "I didn't exactly flunk out or anything. I just quit, sort of."

"Why, may I ask?"

"Why? Oh, well it's a long story, sir. I mean it's pretty complicated." I didn't feel like going into the whole thing with him. He wouldn't have understood it anyway. It wasn't up his alley at all. One of the biggest reasons I left Elkton Hills was because I was surrounded by phonies. That's all. They were coming in the goddam window. For instance, they had this headmaster, Mr. Haas, that was the phoniest bastard I ever

met in my life. Ten times worse than old Thurmer. On Sundays, for instance, old Haas went around shaking hands with everybody's parents when they drove up to school. He'd be charming as hell and all. Except if some boy had little old funny-looking parents. You should've seen the way he did with my roommate's parents. I mean if a boy's mother was sort of fat or corny-looking or something, and if somebody's father was one of those guys that wear those suits with very big shoulders and corny black-and-white shoes, then old Haas would just shake hands with them and give them a phony smile and then he'd go talk, for maybe a half an hour, with somebody else's parents. I can't stand that stuff. It drives me crazy. It makes me so depressed I go crazy. I hated that goddam Elkton Hills.

Old Spencer asked me something then, but I didn't hear him. I was thinking about old Haas. "What, sir?" I said.

"Do you have any particular *qualms* about leaving Pencey?"

"Oh, I have a few qualms, all right. Sure . . . but not too many. Not yet, anyway. I guess it hasn't really hit me yet. It takes things a while to hit me. All I'm doing right now is thinking about going home Wednesday. I'm a moron."

"Do you feel absolutely no concern for your future, boy?"

"Oh, I feel some concern for my future, all right. Sure. Sure, I do." I thought about it for a minute. "But not too much, I guess. Not too much, I guess."

"You *will*," old Spencer said. "You will, boy. You will when it's too late."

I didn't like hearing him say that. It made me sound dead or something. It was very depressing. "I guess I will," I said.

"I'd like to put some sense in that head of yours, boy. I'm trying to help you. I'm trying to *help* you, if I can."

He really was, too. You could see that. But it was

just that we were too much on opposite sides of the pole, that's all. "I know you are, sir," I said. "Thanks a lot. No kidding. I appreciate it. I really do." I got up from the bed then. Boy, I couldn't've sat there another ten minutes to save my life. "The thing is, though, I have to get going now. I have quite a bit of equipment at the gym I have to get to take home with me. I really do." He looked up at me and started nodding again, with this very serious look on his face. I felt sorry as hell for him, all of a sudden. But I just couldn't hang around there any longer, the way we were on opposite sides of the pole, and the way he kept missing the bed whenever he chucked something at it, and his sad old bathrobe with his chest showing, and that grippy smell of Vicks Nose Drops all over the place. "Look, sir. Don't worry about me," I said. "I mean it. I'll be all right. I'm just going through a phase right now. Everybody goes through phases and all, don't they?"

"I don't know, boy. I don't know."

I hate it when somebody answers that way. "Sure. Sure, they do," I said. "I mean it, sir. Please don't worry about me." I sort of put my hand on his shoulder. "Okay?" I said.

"Wouldn't you like a cup of hot chocolate before you go? Mrs. Spencer would be—"

"I would, I really would, but the thing is, I have to get going. I have to go right to the gym. Thanks, though. Thanks a lot, sir."

Then we shook hands. And all that crap. It made me feel sad as hell, though.

"I'll drop you a line, sir. Take care of your grippe, now."

"Good-by, boy."

After I shut the door and started back to the living room, he yelled something at me, but I couldn't exactly hear him. I'm pretty sure he yelled "Good luck!" at me.

I hope not. I hope to hell not. I'd never yell "Good luck!" at anybody. It sounds terrible, when you think about it.

## 3

I'M THE MOST terrific liar you ever saw in your life. It's awful. If I'm on my way to the store to buy a magazine, even, and somebody asks me where I'm going, I'm liable to say I'm going to the opera. It's terrible. So when I told old Spencer I had to go to the gym to get my equipment and stuff, that was a sheer lie. I don't even keep my goddam equipment in the gym.

Where I lived at Pencey, I lived in the Ossenburger Memorial Wing of the new dorms. It was only for juniors and seniors. I was a junior. My roommate was a senior. It was named after this guy Ossenburger that went to Pencey. He made a pot of dough in the undertaking business after he got out of Pencey. What he did, he started these undertaking parlors all over the country that you could get members of your family buried for about five bucks apiece. You should see old Ossenburger. He probably just shoves them in a sack and dumps them in the river. Anyway, he gave Pencey a pile of dough, and they named our wing after him. The first football game of the year, he came up to school in this big goddam Cadillac, and we all had to stand up in the grandstand and give him a locomotive—that's a cheer. Then, the next morning, in chapel, he made a speech that lasted about ten hours. He started off with about fifty corny jokes, just to show us what a regular guy he was. Very big deal. Then he started telling us how he was never ashamed, when he was in some kind of trouble or something, to get right down

on his knees and pray to God. He told us we should always pray to God—talk to Him and all—wherever we were. He told us we ought to think of Jesus as our buddy and all. He said *he* talked to Jesus all the time. Even when he was driving his car. That killed me. I can just see the big phony bastard shifting into first gear and asking Jesus to send him a few more stiffes. The only good part of his speech was right in the middle of it. He was telling us all about what a swell guy he was, what a hot-shot and all, then all of a sudden this guy sitting in the row in front of me, Edgar Marsalla, laid this terrific fart. It was a very crude thing to do, in chapel and all, but it was also quite amusing. Old Marsalla. He damn near blew the roof off. Hardly anybody laughed out loud, and old Ossenburger made out like he didn't even hear it, but old Thurmer, the headmaster, was sitting right next to him on the rostrum and all, and you could tell *he* heard it. *Boy*, was he sore. He didn't say anything then, but the next night he made us have compulsory study hall in the academic building and he came up and made a speech. He said that the boy that had created the disturbance in chapel wasn't fit to go to Pencey. We tried to get old Marsalla to rip off another one, right while old Thurmer was making his speech, but he wasn't in the right mood. Anyway, that's where I lived at Pencey. Old Ossenburger Memorial Wing, in the new dorms.

It was pretty nice to get back to my room, after I left old Spencer, because everybody was down at the game, and the heat was on in our room, for a change. It felt sort of cosy. I took off my coat and my tie and unbuttoned my shirt collar, and then I put on this hat that I'd bought in New York that morning. It was this red hunting hat, with one of those very, very long peaks. I saw it in the window of this sports store when we got out of the subway, just after I noticed I'd lost all the goddam foils. It only cost me a buck. The way

I wore it, I swung the old peak way around to the back—very corny, I'll admit, but I liked it that way. I looked good in it that way. Then I got this book I was reading and sat down in my chair. There were two chairs in every room. I had one and my roommate, Ward Stradlater, had one. The arms were in sad shape, because everybody was always sitting on them, but they were pretty comfortable chairs.

The book I was reading was this book I took out of the library by mistake. They gave me the wrong book, and I didn't notice it till I got back to my room. They gave me *Out of Africa*, by Isak Dinesen. I thought it was going to stink, but it didn't. It was a very good book. I'm quite illiterate, but I read a lot. My favorite author is my brother D.B., and my next favorite is Ring Lardner. My brother gave me a book by Ring Lardner for my birthday, just before I went to Pencey. It had these very funny, crazy plays in it, and then it had this one story about a traffic cop that falls in love with this very cute girl that's always speeding. Only, he's married, the cop, so he can't marry her or anything. Then this girl gets killed, because she's always speeding. That story just about killed me. What I like best is a book that's at least funny once in a while. I read a lot of classical books, like *The Return of the Native* and all, and I like them, and I read a lot of war books and mysteries and all, but they don't knock me out too much. What really knocks me out is a book that, when you're all done reading it, you wish the author that wrote it was a terrific friend of yours and you could call him up on the phone whenever you felt like it. That doesn't happen much, though. I wouldn't mind calling this Isak Dinesen up. And Ring Lardner, except that D.B. told me he's dead. You take that book *Of Human Bondage*, by Somerset Maugham, though. I read it last summer. It's a pretty good book and all, but I wouldn't want to call Somerset Maugham up. I don't know. He just isn't the kind of guy I'd want to

call up, that's all. I'd rather call old Thomas Hardy up. I like that Eustacia Vye.

Anyway, I put on my new hat and sat down and started reading that book *Out of Africa*. I'd read it already, but I wanted to read certain parts over again. I'd only read about three pages, though, when I heard somebody coming through the shower curtains. Even without looking up, I knew right away who it was. It was Robert Ackley, this guy that roomed right next to me. There was a shower right between every two rooms in our wing, and about eighty-five times a day old Ackley barged in on me. He was probably the only guy in the whole dorm, besides me, that wasn't down at the game. He hardly ever went *anywhere*. He was a very peculiar guy. He was a senior, and he'd been at Pencey the whole four years and all, but nobody ever called him anything except "Ackley." Not even Herb Gale, his own roommate, ever called him "Bob" or even "Ack." If he ever gets married, his own wife'll probably call him "Ackley." He was one of these very, very tall, round-shouldered guys—he was about six four—with lousy teeth. The whole time he roomed next to me, I never even once saw him brush his teeth. They always looked mossy and awful, and he damn near made you sick if you saw him in the dining room with his mouth full of mashed potatoes and peas or something. Besides that, he had a lot of pimples. Not just on his forehead or his chin, like most guys, but all over his whole face. And not only that, he had a terrible personality. He was also sort of a nasty guy. I wasn't too crazy about him, to tell you the truth.

I could feel him standing on the shower ledge, right behind my chair, taking a look to see if Stradlater was around. He hated Stradlater's guts and he never came in the room if Stradlater was around. He hated everybody's guts, damn near.

He came down off the shower ledge and came in the room. "Hi," he said. He always said it like he was ter-

rically bored or terrifically tired. He didn't want you to think he was *visiting* you or anything. He wanted you to think he'd come in by *mistake*, for God's sake.

"Hi," I said, but I didn't look up from my book. With a guy like Ackley, if you looked up from your book you were a goner. You were a goner *anyway*, but not as quick if you didn't look up right away.

He started walking around the room, very slow and all, the way he always did, picking up your personal stuff off your desk and chiffonier. He always picked up your personal stuff and looked at it. Boy, could he get on your nerves sometimes. "How was the fencing?" he said. He just wanted me to quit reading and enjoying myself. He didn't give a damn about the fencing. "We win, or what?" he said.

"Nobody won," I said. Without looking up, though.

"What?" he said. He always made you say everything twice.

"Nobody won," I said. I sneaked a look to see what he was fiddling around with on my chiffonier. He was looking at this picture of this girl I used to go around with in New York, Sally Hayes. He must've picked up that goddam picture and looked at it at least five thousand times since I got it. He always put it back in the wrong place, too, when he was finished. He did it on purpose. You could tell.

"Nobody won," he said. "How come?"

"I left the goddam foils and stuff on the subway." I still didn't look up at him.

"On the *subway*, for Chrissake! Ya *lost* them, ya mean?"

"We got on the wrong subway. I had to keep getting up to look at a goddam map on the wall."

He came over and stood right in my light. "Hey," I said. "I've read this same sentence about twenty times since you came in."

Anybody else except Ackley would've taken the

goddam hint. Not him, though. "Think they'll make ya pay for 'em?" he said.

"I don't know, and I don't give a damn. How 'bout sitting *down* or something, Ackley kid? You're right in my goddam light." He didn't like it when you called him "Ackley kid." He was always telling me I was a goddam kid, because I was sixteen and he was eighteen. It drove him mad when I called him "Ackley kid."

He kept standing there. He was *exactly* the kind of a guy that wouldn't get out of your light when you asked him to. He'd *do* it, finally, but it took him a lot longer if you *asked* him to. "What the hellyya reading?" he said.

"Goddam book."

He shoved my book back with his hand so that he could see the name of it. "Any good?" he said.

"This sentence I'm reading is terrific." I can be quite sarcastic when I'm in the mood. He didn't get it, though. He started walking around the room again, picking up all my personal stuff, and Stradlater's. Finally, I put my book down on the floor. You couldn't read anything with a guy like Ackley around. It was impossible.

I slid way the hell down in my chair and watched old Ackley making himself at home. I was feeling sort of tired from the trip to New York and all, and I started yawning. Then I started horsing around a little bit. Sometimes I horse around quite a lot, just to keep from getting bored. What I did was, I pulled the old peak of my hunting hat around to the front, then pulled it way down over my eyes. That way, I couldn't see a goddam thing. "I think I'm going blind," I said in this very hoarse voice. "Mother darling, everything's getting so *dark* in here."

"You're nuts. I swear to God," Ackley said.

"Mother darling, give me your *hand*. Why won't you give me your *hand*?"

"For Chrissake, grow up."

I started groping around in front of me, like a blind guy, but without getting up or anything. I kept saying, "Mother darling, why won't you give me your *hand*?" I was only horsing around, naturally. That stuff gives me a bang sometimes. Besides, I know it annoyed hell out of old Ackley. He always brought out the old sadist in me. I was pretty sadistic with him quite often. Finally, I quit, though. I pulled the peak around to the back again, and relaxed.

"Who belongsa this?" Ackley said. He was holding my roommate's knee supporter up to show me. That guy Ackley'd pick up *anything*. He'd even pick up your jock strap or something. I told him it was Stradlater's. So he chucked it on Stradlater's bed. He got it off Stradlater's *chiffonier*, so he chucked it on the *bed*.

He came over and sat down on the arm of Stradlater's chair. He never sat down *in* a chair. Just always on the arm. "Where the hellja get that hat?" he said.

"New York."

"How much?"

"A buck."

"You got robbed." He started cleaning his goddam fingernails with the end of a match. He was always cleaning his fingernails. It was funny, in a way. His teeth were always mossy-looking, and his ears were always dirty as hell, but he was always cleaning his fingernails. I guess he thought that made him a very *neat* guy. He took another look at my hat while he was cleaning them. "Up home we wear a hat like that to shoot *deer* in, for Chrissake," he said. "That's a deer shooting hat."

"Like hell it is." I took it off and looked at it. I sort of closed one eye, like I was taking aim at it. "This is a people shooting hat," I said. "I shoot people in this hat."

"Your folks know you got kicked out yet?"

"Nope."

"Where the hell's Stradlater at, anyway?"

"Down at the game. He's got a date." I yawned. I was yawning all over the place. For one thing, the room was too damn hot. It made you sleepy. At Pencey, you either froze to death or died of the heat.

"The great Stradlater," Ackley said. "—Hey. Lend me your scissors a second, willya? Ya got 'em handy?"

"No. I packed them already. They're way in the top of the closet."

"Get 'em a second, willya?" Ackley said, "I got this hangnail I want to cut off."

He didn't care if you'd packed something or not and had it way in the top of the closet. I got them for him though. I nearly got killed doing it, too. The second I opened the closet door, Stradlater's tennis racket—in its wooden press and all—fell right on my head. It made a big *chunk*, and it hurt like hell. It damn near killed old Ackley, though. He started laughing in this very high falsetto voice. He kept laughing the whole time I was taking down my suitcase and getting the scissors out for him. Something like that—a guy getting hit on the head with a rock or something—tickled the pants off Ackley. "You have a damn good sense of humor, Ackley kid," I told him. "You know that?" I handed him the scissors. "Lemme be your manager. I'll get you on the goddam radio." I sat down in my chair again, and he started cutting his big horny-looking nails. "How 'bout using the table or something?" I said. "Cut 'em over the table, willya? I don't feel like walking on your crumby nails in my bare feet tonight." He kept right on cutting them over the floor, though. What lousy manners. I mean it.

"Who's Stradlater's date?" he said. He was always keeping tabs on who Stradlater was dating, even though he hated Stradlater's guts.

"I don't know. Why?"

"No reason. Boy, I can't stand that sonuvabitch. He's one sonuvabitch I really can't stand."

"He's crazy about *you*. He told me he thinks you're a goddam prince," I said. I call people a "prince" quite often when I'm horsing around. It keeps me from getting bored or something.

"He's got this superior *attitude* all the time," Ackley said. "I just can't stand the sonuvabitch. You'd think he—"

"Do you mind cutting your nails over the *table*, hey?" I said. "I've asked you about fifty—"

"He's got this goddam superior attitude all the time," Ackley said. "I don't even think the sonuvabitch is intelligent. He *thinks* he is. He thinks he's about the most—"

"Ackley! For Chrissake. Willya *please* cut your crumby nails over the table? I've asked you fifty times."

He started cutting his nails over the table, for a change. The only way he ever did anything was if you yelled at him.

I watched him for a while. Then I said, "The reason you're sore at Stradlater is because he said that stuff about brushing your teeth once in a while. He didn't mean to insult you, for cryin' out loud. He didn't *say* it right or anything, but he didn't mean anything insulting. All he meant was you'd look better and *feel* better if you sort of brushed your teeth once in a while."

"I brush my teeth. Don't gimme *that*."

"No, you don't. I've seen you, and you don't," I said. I didn't say it nasty, though. I felt sort of sorry for him, in a way. I mean it isn't too nice, naturally, if somebody tells you you don't brush your teeth. "Stradlater's all right. He's not too bad," I said. "You don't know him, that's the trouble."

"I still say he's a sonuvabitch. He's a conceited sonuvabitch."

"He's conceited, but he's very generous in some things. He really is," I said. "Look. Suppose, for in-

stance, Stradlater was wearing a tie or something that you liked. Say he had a tie on that you liked a helluva lot—I'm just giving you an example, now. You know what he'd do? He'd probably take it off and give it to you. He really would. Or—you know what he'd do? He'd leave it on your bed or something. But he'd *give* you the goddam tie. Most guys would probably just—"

"*Hell*," Ackley said. "If I had his dough, I would, too."

"No, you wouldn't." I shook my head. "No, you wouldn't, Ackley kid. If you had his dough, you'd be one of the biggest—"

"Stop calling me 'Ackley kid,' God damn it. I'm old enough to be your lousy father."

"No, you're not." Boy, he could really be aggravating sometimes. He never missed a chance to let you know you were sixteen and he was eighteen. "In the first place, I wouldn't let you *in* my goddam family," I said.

"Well, just cut out calling me—"

All of a sudden the door opened, and old Stradlater barged in, in a big hurry. He was always in a big hurry. Everything was a very big deal. He came over to me and gave me these two playful as hell slaps on both cheeks—which is something that can be very annoying. "Listen," he said. "You going out anywheres special tonight?"

"I don't know. I might. What the hell's it doing out-snowing?" He had snow all over his coat.

"Yeah. Listen. If you're not going out anyplace special, how 'bout lending me your hound's-tooth jacket?"

"Who won the game?" I said.

"It's only the half. We're leaving," Stradlater said. "No kidding, you gonna use your hound's-tooth tonight or not? I spilled some crap all over my gray flannel."

"No, but I don't want you stretching it with your goddam shoulders and all," I said. We were practically



the same heighth, but he weighed about twice as much as I did. He had these very broad shoulders.

"I won't stretch it." He went over to the closet in a big hurry. "How'sa boy, Ackley?" he said to Ackley. He was at least a pretty friendly guy, Stradlater. It was partly a phony kind of friendly, but at least he always said hello to Ackley and all.

Ackley just sort of grunted when he said "How'sa boy?" He wouldn't *answer* him, but he didn't have guts enough not to at least grunt. Then he said to me, "I think I'll get going. See ya later."

"Okay," I said. He never exactly broke your heart when he went back to his own room.

Old Stradlater started taking off his coat and tie and all. "I think maybe I'll take a fast shave," he said. He had a pretty heavy beard. He really did.

"Where's your date?" I asked him.

"She's waiting in the Annex." He went out of the room with his toilet kit and towel under his arm. No shirt on or anything. He always walked around in his bare torso because he thought he had a damn good build. He did, too. I have to admit it.

## 4

I DIDN'T HAVE anything special to do, so I went down to the can and chewed the rag with him while he was shaving. We were the only ones in the can, because everybody was still down at the game. It was hot as hell and the windows were all steamy. There were about ten washbowls, all right against the wall. Stradlater had the middle one. I sat down on the one right next to him and started turning the cold water on and off—this nervous habit I have. Stradlater kept

whistling "Song of India" while he shaved. He had one of those very piercing whistles that are practically never in tune, and he always picked out some song that's hard to whistle even if you're a *good* whistler, like "Song of India" or "Slaughter on Tenth Avenue." He could really mess a song up.

You remember I said before that Ackley was a slob in his personal habits? Well, so was Stradlater, but in a different way. Stradlater was more of a secret slob. He always *looked* all right, Stradlater, but for instance, you should've seen the razor he shaved himself with. It was always rusty as hell and full of lather and hairs and crap. He never cleaned it or anything. He always *looked* good when he was finished fixing himself up, but he was a secret slob anyway, if you knew him the way I did. The reason he fixed himself up to look good was because he was madly in love with himself. He thought he was the handsomest guy in the Western Hemisphere. He *was* pretty handsome, too—I'll admit it. But he was mostly the kind of a handsome guy that if your parents saw his picture in your Year Book, they'd right away say, "Who's *this* boy?" I mean he was mostly a Year Book-kind of handsome guy. I knew a lot of guys at Pencey I thought were a lot handsomer than Stradlater, but they wouldn't look handsome if you saw their pictures in the Year Book. They'd look like they had big noses or their ears stuck out. I've had that experience frequently.

Anyway, I was sitting on the washbowl next to where Stradlater was shaving, sort of turning the water on and off. I still had my red hunting hat on, with the peak around to the back and all. I really got a bang out of that hat.

"Hey," Stradlater said. "Wanna do me a big favor?"

"What?" I said. Not too enthusiastic. He was always asking you to do him a big favor. You take a very handsome guy, or a guy that thinks he's a real hot-shot, and they're always asking you to do them a big favor.



Just because *they're* crazy about themselves, they think *you're* crazy about them, too, and that you're just dying to do them a favor. It's sort of funny, in a way.

"You goin' out tonight?" he said.

"I might. I might not. I don't know. Why?"

"I got about a hundred pages to read for history for Monday," he said. "How 'bout writing a composition for me, for English? I'll be up the creek if I don't get the goddam thing in by Monday, the reason I ask. How 'bout it?"

It was very ironical. It really was.

"I'm the one that's flunking out of the goddam place, and *you're* asking me to write you a goddam composition," I said.

"Yeah, I know. The thing is, though, I'll be up the creek if I don't get it in. Be a buddy. Be a buddyroo. Okay?"

I didn't answer him right away. Suspense is good for some bastards like Stradlater.

"What on?" I said.

"Anything. Anything descriptive. A room. Or a house. Or something you once lived in or something—you know. Just as long as it's descriptive as hell." He gave out a big yawn while he said that. Which is something that gives me a royal pain in the ass. I mean if somebody *yawns* right while they're asking you to do them a goddam favor. "Just don't do it *too* good, is all," he said. "That sonuvabitch Hartzell thinks you're a hot-shot in English, and he knows you're my roommate. So I mean don't stick all the commas and stuff in the right place."

That's something else that gives me a royal pain. I mean if you're good at writing compositions and somebody starts talking about commas. Stradlater was always doing that. He wanted you to think that the only reason *he* was lousy at writing compositions was because he stuck all the commas in the wrong place. He was a little bit like Ackley, that way. I once sat next

to Ackley at this basketball game. We had a terrific guy on the team, Howie Coyle, that could sink them from the middle of the floor, without even touching the backboard or anything. Ackley kept saying, the whole goddam game, that Coyle had a perfect *build* for basketball. God, how I hate that stuff.

I got bored sitting on that washbowl after a while, so I backed up a few feet and started doing this tap dance, just for the hell of it. I was just amusing myself. I can't really tap-dance or anything, but it was a stone floor in the can, and it was good for tap-dancing. I started imitating one of those guys in the movies. In one of those *musicals*. I hate the movies like poison, but I get a bang imitating them. Old Stradlater watched me in the mirror while he was shaving. All I need's an audience. I'm an exhibitionist. "I'm the goddam Governor's son," I said. I was knocking myself out. Tap-dancing all over the place. "He doesn't want me to be a tap dancer. He wants me to go to Oxford. But it's in my goddam blood, tap-dancing." Old Stradlater laughed. He didn't have too bad a sense of humor. "It's the opening night of the *Ziegfeld Follies*." I was getting out of breath. I have hardly any wind at all. "The leading man can't go on. He's drunk as a bastard. So who do they get to take his place? Me, that's who. The little ole goddam Governor's son."

"Where'dja get that hat?" Stradlater said. He meant my hunting hat. He'd never seen it before.

I was out of breath anyway, so I quit horsing around. I took off my hat and looked at it for about the ninetieth time. "I got it in New York this morning. For a buck. Ya like it?"

Stradlater nodded. "Sharp," he said. He was only flattering me, though, because right away he said, "Listen. Are ya gonna write that composition for me? I have to know."

"If I get the time, I will. If I don't, I won't," I said. I

went over and sat down on the washbowl next to him again. "Who's your date?" I asked him. "Fitzgerald?"

"Hell, no! I told ya, I'm through with that pig."

"Yeah? Give her to me, boy. No kidding. She's my type."

"Take her . . . She's too old for you."

All of a sudden—for no good reason, really, except that I was sort of in the mood for horsing around—I felt like jumping off the washbowl and getting old Stradlater in a half nelson. That's a wrestling hold, in case you don't know, where you get the other guy around the neck and choke him to death, if you feel like it. So I did it. I landed on him like a goddam panther.

"Cut it out, Holden, for Chrissake!" Stradlater said. He didn't feel like horsing around. He was shaving and all. "Wuddaya wanna make me do—cut my goddam head off?"

I didn't let go, though. I had a pretty good half nelson on him. "Liberate yourself from my viselike grip," I said.

"Je-sus Christ." He put down his razor, and all of a sudden jerked his arms up and sort of broke my hold on him. He was a very strong guy. I'm a very weak guy. "Now, cut out the crap," he said. He started shaving himself all over again. He always shaved himself twice, to look gorgeous. With his crumby old razor.

"Who *is* your date if it isn't Fitzgerald?" I asked him. I sat down on the washbowl next to him again. "That Phyllis Smith babe?"

"No. It was supposed to be, but the arrangements got all screwed up. I got Bud Thaw's girl's roommate now . . . Hey. I almost forgot. She knows *you*."

"Who does?" I said.

"My date."

"Yeah?" I said. "What's her name?" I was pretty interested.

"I'm thinking . . . Uh. Jean Gallagher."

Boy, I nearly dropped *dead* when he said that.

"*Jane* Gallagher," I said. I even got up from the washbowl when he said that. I damn near dropped dead. "You're damn right I know her. She practically lived right next *door* to me, the summer before last. She had this big damn Doberman pinscher. That's how I met her. Her dog used to keep coming over in our—"

"You're right in my light, Holden, for Chrissake," Stradlater said. "Ya have to stand right there?"

Boy, was I excited, though. I really was.

"Where is she?" I asked him. "I oughta go down and say hello to her or something. Where is she? In the Annex?"

"Yeah."

"How'd she happen to mention me? Does she go to B.M. now? She said she might go there. She said she might go to Shipley, too. I thought she went to Shipley. How'd she happen to mention me?" I was pretty excited. I really was.

"I don't know, for Chrissake. Lift up, willya? You're on my towel," Stradlater said. I was sitting on his stupid towel.

"Jane Gallagher," I said. I couldn't get over it. "Jesus H. Christ."

Old Stradlater was putting Vitalis on his hair. *My* Vitalis.

"She's a dancer," I said. "Ballet and all. She used to practice about two hours every day, right in the middle of the hottest weather and all. She was worried that it might make her legs lousy—all thick and all. I used to play checkers with her all the time."

"You used to play *what* with her all the time?"

"Checkers."

"*Checkers*, for Chrissake!"

"Yeah. She wouldn't move any of her kings. What she'd do, when she'd get a king, she wouldn't move it.

She'd just leave it in the back row. She'd get them all lined up in the back row. Then she'd never use them. She just liked the way they looked when they were all in the back row."

Stradlater didn't say anything. That kind of stuff doesn't interest most people.

"Her mother belonged to the same club we did," I said. "I used to caddy once in a while, just to make some dough. I caddy'd for her mother a couple of times. She went around in about a hundred and seventy, for nine holes."

Stradlater wasn't hardly listening. He was combing his gorgeous locks.

"I oughta go down and at least say hello to her," I said.

"Why don'tcha?"

"I will, in a minute."

He started parting his hair all over again. It took him about an hour to comb his hair.

"Her mother and father were divorced. Her mother was married again to some booze hound," I said. "Skinny guy with hairy legs. I remember him. He wore shorts all the time. Jane said he was supposed to be a playwright or some goddam thing, but all I ever saw him do was booze all the time and listen to every single goddam mystery program on the radio. And run around the goddam house, naked. With Jane around, and all."

"Yeah?" Stradlater said. That really interested him. About the booze hound running around the house naked, with Jane around. Stradlater was a very sexy bastard.

"She had a lousy childhood. I'm not kidding."

That didn't interest Stradlater, though. Only very sexy stuff interested him.

"Jane Gallagher. Jesus." I couldn't get her off my mind. I really couldn't. "I oughta go down and say hello to her, at least."

"Why the hell don'tcha, instead of keep saying it?" Stradlater said.

I walked over to the window, but you couldn't see out of it, it was so steamy from all the heat in the can. "I'm not in the mood right now," I said. I wasn't, either. You have to be in the mood for those things. "I thought she went to Shipley. I could've sworn she went to Shipley." I walked around the can for a little while. I didn't have anything else to do. "Did she enjoy the game?" I said.

"Yeah, I guess so. I don't know."

"Did she tell you we used to play checkers all the time, or anything?"

"I don't know. For Chrissake, I only just *met* her," Stradlater said. He was finished combing his goddam gorgeous hair. He was putting away all his crumby toilet articles.

"Listen. Give her my regards, willya?"

"Okay," Stradlater said, but I knew he probably wouldn't. You take a guy like Stradlater, they never give your regards to people.

He went back to the room, but I stuck around in the can for a while, thinking about old Jane. Then I went back to the room, too.

Stradlater was putting on his tie, in front of the mirror, when I got there. He spent around half his goddam life in front of the mirror. I sat down in my chair and sort of watched him for a while.

"Hey," I said. "Don't tell her I got kicked out, willya?"

"Okay."

That was one good thing about Stradlater. You didn't have to explain every goddam little thing with him, the way you had to do with Ackley. Mostly, I guess, because he wasn't too interested. That's really why. Ackley, it was different. Ackley was a very nosy bastard.

He put on my hound's-tooth jacket.

"Jesus, now, try not to stretch it all over the place," I said. I'd only worn it about twice.

"I won't. Where the hell's my cigarettes?"

"On the desk." He never knew where he left anything. "Under your muffler." He put them in his coat pocket—*my* coat pocket.

I pulled the peak of my hunting hat around to the front all of a sudden, for a change. I was getting sort of nervous, all of a sudden. I'm quite a nervous guy. "Listen, where ya going on your date with her?" I asked him. "Ya know yet?"

"I don't know. New York, if we have time. She only signed out for nine-thirty, for Chrissake."

I didn't like the way he said it, so I said, "The reason she did that, she probably just didn't know what a handsome, charming bastard you are. If she'd *known*, she probably would've signed out for nine-thirty in the *morning*."

"Goddam right," Stradlater said. You couldn't rile him too easily. He was too conceited. "No kidding, now. Do that composition for me," he said. He had his coat on, and he was all ready to go. "Don't knock yourself out or anything, but just make it descriptive as hell. Okay?"

I didn't answer him. I didn't feel like it. All I said was, "Ask her if she still keeps all her kings in the back row."

"Okay," Stradlater said, but I knew he wouldn't. "Take it easy, now." He banged the hell out of the room.

I sat there for about a half hour after he left. I mean I just sat in my chair, not doing anything. I kept thinking about Jane, and about Stradlater having a date with her and all. It made me so nervous I nearly went crazy. I already told you what a sexy bastard Stradlater was.

All of a sudden, Ackley barged back in again, through the damn shower curtains, as usual. For once

in my stupid life, I was really glad to see him. He took my mind off the other stuff.

He stuck around till around dinnertime, talking about all the guys at Pencey that he hated their guts, and squeezing this big pimple on his chin. He didn't even use his handkerchief. I don't even think the bastard *had* a handkerchief, if you want to know the truth. I never saw him use one, anyway.

## 5

WE ALWAYS HAD the same meal on Saturday nights at Pencey. It was supposed to be a big deal, because they gave you steak. I'll bet a thousand bucks the reason they did that was because a lot of guys' parents came up to school on Sunday, and old Thurmer probably figured everybody's mother would ask their darling boy what he had for dinner last night, and he'd say, "Steak." What a racket. You should've seen the steaks. They were these little hard, dry jobs that you could hardly even cut. You always got these very lumpy mashed potatoes on steak night, and for dessert you got Brown Betty, which nobody ate, except maybe the little kids in the lower school that didn't know any better—and guys like Ackley that ate *everything*.

It was nice, though, when we got out of the dining room. There were about three inches of snow on the ground, and it was still coming down like a madman. It looked pretty as hell, and we all started throwing snowballs and horsing around all over the place. It was very childish, but everybody was really enjoying themselves.

I didn't have a date or anything, so I and this friend

of mine, Mal Brossard, that was on the wrestling team, decided we'd take a bus into Agerstown and have a hamburger and maybe see a lousy movie. Neither of us felt like sitting around on our ass all night. I asked Mal if he minded if Ackley came along with us. The reason I asked was because Ackley never did *anything* on Saturday night, except stay in his room and squeeze his pimples or something. Mal said he didn't *mind* but that he wasn't too crazy about the idea. He didn't like Ackley much. Anyway, we both went to our rooms to get ready and all, and while I was putting on my galoshes and crap, I yelled over and asked old Ackley if he wanted to go to the movies. He could hear me all right through the shower curtains, but he didn't answer me right away. He was the kind of a guy that hates to answer you right away. Finally he came over, through the goddam curtains, and stood on the shower ledge and asked who was going besides me. He always had to know who was going. I swear, if that guy was shipwrecked somewhere, and you rescued him in a goddam boat, he'd want to know who the guy was that was rowing it before he'd even get in. I told him Mal Brossard was going. He said, "*That* bastard . . . All right. Wait a second." You'd think he was doing you a big favor.

It took him about five hours to get ready. While he was doing it, I went over to my window and opened it and packed a snowball with my bare hands. The snow was very good for packing. I didn't throw it at anything, though. I *started* to throw it. At a car that was parked across the street. But I changed my mind. The car looked so nice and white. Then I started to throw it at a hydrant, but that looked too nice and white, too. Finally I didn't throw it at anything. All I did was close the window and walk around the room with the snowball, packing it harder. A little while later, I still had it with me when I and Brossard and Ackley got on the bus. The bus driver opened the doors and made me

throw it out. I *told* him I wasn't going to chuck it at anybody, but he wouldn't believe me. People never <sup>all</sup> believe you.

Brossard and Ackley both had seen the picture that was playing, so all we did, we just had a couple of hamburgers and played the pinball machine for a little while, then took the bus back to Pencey. I didn't care about not seeing the movie, anyway. It was supposed to be a comedy, with Cary Grant in it, and all that crap. Besides, I'd been to the movies with Brossard and Ackley before. They both laughed like hyenas at stuff that wasn't even funny. I didn't even enjoy sitting next to them in the movies.

It was only about a quarter to nine when we got back to the dorm. Old Brossard was a bridge fiend, and he started looking around the dorm for a game. Old Ackley parked himself in my room, just for a change. Only, instead of sitting on the arm of Stradlater's chair, he laid down on my bed, with his face right on my pillow and all. He started talking in this very monotonous voice, and picking at all his pimples. I dropped about a thousand hints, but I couldn't get rid of him. All he did was keep talking in this very monotonous voice about some babe he was supposed to have had sexual intercourse with the summer before. He'd already told me about it about a hundred times. Every time he told it, it was different. One minute he'd be giving it to her in his cousin's Buick, the next minute he'd be giving it to her under some boardwalk. It was all a lot of crap, naturally. He was a virgin if ever I saw one. I doubt if he ever even gave anybody a feel. Anyway, finally I had to come right out and tell him that I had to write a composition for Stradlater, and that he had to clear the hell out, so I could concentrate. He finally did, but he took his time about it, as usual. After he left, I put on my pajamas and bathrobe and my old hunting hat, and started writing the composition.

The thing was, I couldn't think of a room or a house or anything to describe the way Stradlater said he had <sup>he</sup>ave. I'm not too crazy about describing rooms and houses anyway. So what I did, I wrote about my brother Allie's baseball mitt. It was a very descriptive subject. It really was. My brother Allie had this left-handed fielder's mitt. He was left-handed. The thing that was descriptive about it, though, was that he had poems written all over the fingers and the pocket and everywhere. In green ink. He wrote them on it so that he'd have something to read when he was in the field and nobody was up at bat. He's dead now. He got leukemia and died when we were up in Maine, on July 18, 1946. You'd have liked him. He was two years younger than I was, but he was about fifty times as intelligent. He was terrifically intelligent. His teachers were always writing letters to my mother, telling her what a pleasure it was having a boy like Allie in their class. And they weren't just shooting the crap. They really meant it. But it wasn't just that he was the most intelligent member in the family. He was also the nicest, in lots of ways. He never got mad at anybody. People with red hair are supposed to get mad very easily, but Allie never did, and he had very red hair. I'll tell you what kind of red hair he had. I started playing golf when I was only ten years old. I remember once, the summer I was around twelve, teeing off and all, and having a hunch that if I turned around all of a sudden, I'd see Allie. So I did, and sure enough, he was sitting on his bike outside the fence—there was this fence that went all around the course—and he was sitting there, about a hundred and fifty yards behind me, watching me tee off. That's the kind of red hair he had. God, he was a nice kid, though. He used to laugh so hard at something he thought of at the dinner table that he just about fell off his chair. I was only thirteen, and they were going to have me

psychoanalyzed and all, because I broke all the windows in the garage. I don't blame them. I really don't. I slept in the garage the night he died, and I broke all the goddam windows with my fist, just for the hell of it. I even tried to break all the windows on the station wagon we had that summer, but my hand was already broken and everything by that time, and I couldn't do it. It was a very stupid thing to do, I'll admit, but I hardly didn't even know I was doing it, and you didn't know Allie. My hand still hurts me once in a while, when it rains and all, and I can't make a real fist any more—not a tight one, I mean—but outside of that I don't care much. I mean I'm not going to be a goddam surgeon or a violinist or anything *anyway*.

Anyway, that's what I wrote Stradlater's composition about. Old Allie's baseball mitt. I happened to have it with me, in my suitcase, so I got it out and copied down the poems that were written on it. All I had to do was change Allie's name so that nobody would know it was my brother and not Stradlater's. I wasn't too crazy about doing it, but I couldn't think of anything else descriptive. Besides, I sort of liked writing about it. It took me about an hour, because I had to use Stradlater's lousy typewriter, and it kept jamming on me. The reason I didn't use my own was because I'd lent it to a guy down the hall.

It was around ten-thirty, I guess, when I finished it. I wasn't tired, though, so I looked out the window for a while. It wasn't snowing out any more, but every once in a while you could hear a car somewhere not being able to get started. You could also hear old Ackley snoring. Right through the goddam shower curtains you could hear him. He had sinus trouble and he couldn't breathe too hot when he was asleep. That guy had just about everything. Sinus trouble, pimples, lousy teeth, halitosis, crumby fingernails. You had to feel a little sorry for the crazy sonuvabitch.

## 6

SOME THINGS are hard to remember. I'm thinking now of when Stradlater got back from his date with Jane. I mean I can't remember exactly what I was doing when I heard his goddam stupid footsteps coming down the corridor. I probably was still looking out the window, but I swear I can't remember. I was so damn worried, that's why. When I really worry about something, I don't just fool around. I even have to go to the bathroom when I worry about something. Only, I don't go. I'm too worried to go. I don't want to interrupt my worrying to go. If you knew Stradlater, you'd have been worried, too. I'd double-dated with that bastard a couple of times, and I know what I'm talking about. He was unscrupulous. He really was.

Anyway, the corridor was all linoleum and all, and you could hear his goddam footsteps coming right towards the room. I don't even remember where I was sitting when he came in—at the window, or in my chair or his. I swear I can't remember.

He came in griping about how cold it was out. Then he said, "Where the hell is everybody? It's like a goddam morgue around here." I didn't even bother to answer him. If he was so goddam stupid not to realize it was Saturday night and everybody was out or asleep or home for the week end, I wasn't going to break my neck telling him. He started getting undressed. He didn't say one goddam word about Jane. Not one. Neither did I. I just watched him. All he did was thank me for letting him wear my hound's-tooth. He hung it up on a hanger and put it in the closet.

Then when he was taking off his tie, he asked me if I'd written his goddam composition for him. I told him

it was over on his goddam bed. He walked over and read it while he was unbuttoning his shirt. He stood there, reading it, and sort of stroking his bare chest and stomach, with this very stupid expression on his face. He was always stroking his stomach or his chest. He was mad about himself.

All of a sudden, he said, "For Chrissake, Holden. This is about a goddam *baseball glove*."

"So what?" I said. Cold as hell.

"Wuddaya mean so *what*? I told ya it had to be about a goddam *room* or a house or something."

"You said it had to be descriptive. What the hell's the difference if it's about a baseball glove?"

"God damn it." He was sore as hell. He was really furious. "You always do everything backasswards." He looked at me. "No wonder you're flunking the hell out of here," he said. "You don't do *one damn thing* the way you're supposed to. I mean it. Not one damn thing."

"All right, give it back to me, then," I said. I went over and pulled it right out of his goddam hand. Then I tore it up.

"What the hellja do *that* for?" he said.

I didn't even answer him. I just threw the pieces in the wastebasket. Then I lay down on my bed, and we both didn't say anything for a long time. He got all undressed, down to his shorts, and I lay on my bed and lit a cigarette. You weren't allowed to smoke in the dorm, but you could do it late at night when everybody was asleep or out and nobody could smell the smoke. Besides, I did it to annoy Stradlater. It drove him crazy when you broke any rules. He never smoked in the dorm. It was only me.

He still didn't say one single solitary word about Jane. So finally I said, "You're back pretty goddam late if she only signed out for nine-thirty. Did you make her be late signing in?"

He was sitting on the edge of his bed, cutting his

goddam toenails, when I asked him that. "Coupla minutes," he said. "Who the hell signs out for nine-thirty on a Saturday night?" God, how I hated him.

"Did you go to New York?" I said.

"Ya crazy? How the hell could we go to New York if she only signed out for nine-thirty?"

"That's tough."

He looked up at me. "Listen," he said, "if you're gonna smoke in the room, how 'bout going down to the can and do it? *You* may be getting the hell out of here, but I have to stick around long enough to graduate."

I ignored him. I really did. I went right on smoking like a madman. All I did was sort of turn over on my side and watched him cut his damn toenails. What a school. You were always watching somebody cut their damn toenails or squeeze their pimples or something.

"Did you give her my regards?" I asked him.

"Yeah."

The hell he did, the bastard.

"What'd she say?" I said. "Did you ask her if she still keeps all her kings in the back row?"

"No, I didn't ask her. What the hell ya think we did all night—play checkers, for Chrissake?"

I didn't even answer him. God, how I hated him.

"If you didn't go to New York, where'd ya go with her?" I asked him, after a little while. I could hardly keep my voice from shaking all over the place. Boy, was I getting nervous. I just had a *feeling* something had gone funny.

He was finished cutting his damn toenails. So he got up from the bed, in just his damn shorts and all, and started getting very damn playful. He came over to my bed and started leaning over me and taking these playful as hell socks at my shoulder. "Cut it out," I said. "Where'd you go with her if you didn't go to New York?"

"Nowhere. We just sat in the goddam car." He gave

me another one of those playful stupid little socks on the shoulder.

"Cut it out," I said. "Whose car?"

"Ed Banky's."

Ed Banky was the basketball coach at Pencey. Old Stradlater was one of his pets, because he was the center on the team, and Ed Banky always let him borrow his car when he wanted it. It wasn't allowed for students to borrow faculty guys' cars, but all the athletic bastards stuck together. In every school I've gone to, all the athletic bastards stick together.

Stradlater kept taking these shadow punches down at my shoulder. He had his toothbrush in his hand, and he put it in his mouth. "What'd you do?" I said. "Give her the time in Ed Banky's goddam car?" My voice was shaking something awful.

"What a thing to say. Want me to wash your mouth out with soap?"

"Did you?"

"That's a professional secret, buddy."

This next part I don't remember so hot. All I know is I got up from the bed, like I was going down to the can or something, and then I tried to sock him, with all my might, right smack in the toothbrush, so it would split his goddam throat open. Only, I missed. I didn't connect. All I did was sort of get him on the side of the head or something. It probably hurt him a little bit, but not as much as I wanted. It probably would've hurt him a lot, but I did it with my right hand, and I can't make a good fist with that hand. On account of that injury I told you about.

Anyway, the next thing I knew, I was on the goddam floor and he was sitting on my chest, with his face all red. That is, he had his goddam *knees* on my chest, and he weighed about a ton. He had hold of my wrists, too, so I couldn't take another sock at him. I'd've killed him.

"What the hell's the matter with you?" he kept say-



ing, and his stupid face kept getting redder and redder. "Get your lousy *knees* off my *chest*," I told him. I was almost bawling. I really was. "Go on, get *offa* me, ya crumby bastard."

He wouldn't do it, though. He kept holding onto my wrists and I kept calling him a sonuvabitch and all, for around ten hours. I can hardly even remember what all I said to him. I told him he thought he could give the time to anybody he felt like. I told him he didn't even care if a girl kept all her kings in the back row or not, and the reason he didn't care was because he was a goddam stupid moron. He hated it when you called him a moron. All morons hate it when you call them a moron.

"Shut up, now, Holden," he said with his big stupid red face. "Just shut up, now."

"You don't even know if her first name is Jane or Jean, ya goddam moron!"

"Now, *shut up*, Holden, God damn it—I'm *warning* ya," he said—I really had him going. "If you don't shut up, I'm gonna slam ya one."

"Get your dirty stinking moron knees off my chest."

"If I letcha up, will you keep your mouth shut?"

I didn't even answer him.

He said it over again. "Holden. If I letcha up, willya keep your mouth shut?"

"Yes."

He got up off me, and I got up, too. My chest hurt like hell from his dirty knees. "You're a dirty stupid sonuvabitch of a moron," I told him.

That got him *really* mad. He shook his big stupid finger in my face. "Holden, God damn it, I'm *warning* you, now. For the last time. If you don't keep your yap shut, I'm gonna—"

"Why should I?" I said—I was practically yelling. "That's just the trouble with all you morons. You never want to discuss anything. That's the way you

can always tell a moron. They never want to discuss anything intellig—"

Then he really let one go at me, and the next thing I knew I was on the goddam floor again. I don't remember if he knocked me out or not, but I don't think so. It's pretty hard to knock a guy out, except in the goddam movies. But my nose was bleeding all over the place. When I looked up, old Stradlater was standing practically right on top of me. He had his goddam toilet kit under his arm. "Why the hell don'tcha shut *up* when I tellya to?" he said. He sounded pretty nervous. He probably was scared he'd fractured my skull or something when I hit the floor. It's too bad I didn't. "You asked for it, God damn it," he said. Boy, did he look worried.

I didn't even bother to get up. I just lay there on the floor for a while, and kept calling him a moron sonuvabitch. I was so mad, I was practically bawling.

"Listen. Go wash your face," Stradlater said. "Ya hear me?"

I told him to go wash his own moron face—which was a pretty childish thing to say, but I was mad as hell. I told him to stop off on the way to the can and give Mrs. Schmidt the time. Mrs. Schmidt was the janitor's wife. She was around sixty-five.

I kept sitting there on the floor till I heard old Stradlater close the door and go down the corridor to the can. Then I got up. I couldn't find my goddam hunting hat anywhere. Finally I found it. It was under the bed. I put it on, and turned the old peak around to the back, the way I liked it, and then I went over and took a look at my stupid face in the mirror. You never saw such gore in your life. I had blood all over my mouth and chin and even on my pajamas and bathrobe. It partly scared me and it partly fascinated me. All that blood and all sort of made me look tough. I'd only been in about two fights in my life, and I lost

both of them. I'm not too tough. I'm a pacifist, if you want to know the truth.

I had a feeling old Ackley'd probably heard all the racket and was awake. So I went through the shower curtains into his room, just to see what the hell he was doing. I hardly ever went over to his room. It always had a funny stink in it, because he was so crumby in his personal habits.

## 7

A TINY BIT of light came through the shower curtains and all from our room, and I could see him lying in bed. I knew damn well he was wide awake. "Ackley?" I said. "Y'awake?"

"Yeah."

It was pretty dark, and I stepped on somebody's shoe on the floor and damn near fell on my head. Ackley sort of sat up in bed and leaned on his arm. He had a lot of white stuff on his face, for his pimples. He looked sort of spooky in the dark. "What the hellyya doing, anyway?" I said.

"Wuddaya mean what the hell am I doing? I was tryna *sleep* before you guys started making all that noise. What the hell was the fight about, anyhow?"

"Where's the light?" I couldn't find the light. I was sliding my hand all over the wall.

"Wuddaya want the light for? . . . Right next to your hand."

I finally found the switch and turned it on. Old Ackley put his hand up so the light wouldn't hurt his eyes.

"Jesus!" he said. "What the hell happened to *you*?" He meant all the blood and all.

"I had a little goddam tiff with Stradlater," I said. Then I sat down on the floor. They never had any chairs in their room. I don't know what the hell they did with their chairs. "Listen," I said, "do you feel like playing a little Canasta?" He was a Canasta fiend.

"You're still *bleeding*, for Chrissake. You better put something on it."

"It'll stop. Listen. Ya wanna play a little Canasta or don'tcha?"

"Canasta, for Chrissake. Do you know what time it is, by any chance?"

"It isn't late. It's only around eleven, eleven-thirty."

"Only around!" Ackley said. "Listen. I gotta get up and go to *Mass* in the morning, for Chrissake. You guys start hollering and fighting in the middle of the goddam—What the hell was the fight about, anyhow?"

"It's a long story. I don't wanna bore ya, Ackley. I'm thinking of your welfare," I told him. I never discussed my personal life with him. In the first place, he was even more stupid than Stradlater. Stradlater was a goddam genius next to Ackley. "Hey," I said, "is it okay if I sleep in Ely's bed tonight? He won't be back till tomorrow night, will he?" I knew damn well he wouldn't. Ely went home damn near every week end.

"I don't know when the hell he's coming back," Ackley said.

Boy, did that annoy me. "What the hell do you mean you don't know when he's coming back? He never comes back till Sunday *night*, does he?"

"No, but for Chrissake, I can't just tell somebody they can sleep in his goddam *bed* if they want to."

That killed me. I reached up from where I was sitting on the floor and patted him on the goddam shoulder. "You're a prince, Ackley kid," I said. "You know that?"

"No, I mean it—I can't just tell somebody they can sleep in—"

"You're a real prince. You're a gentleman and a

scholar, kid," I said. He really was, too. "Do you happen to have any cigarettes, by any chance?—Say 'no' or I'll drop dead."

"No, I don't, as a matter of fact. Listen, what the hell was the fight about?"

I didn't answer him. All I did was, I got up and went over and looked out the window. I felt so lonesome, all of a sudden. I almost wished I was dead.

"What the hell was the fight about, anyhow?" Ackley said, for about the fiftieth time. He certainly was a bore about that.

"About you," I said.

"About *me*, for Chrissake?"

"Yeah. I was defending your goddam honor. Stradlater said you had a lousy personality. I couldn't let him get away with that stuff."

That got him excited. "He did? No kidding? He did?"

I told him I was only kidding, and then I went over and laid down on Ely's bed. Boy, did I feel rotten. I felt so damn lonesome.

"This room stinks," I said. "I can smell your socks from way over here. Don'tcha ever send them to the laundry?"

"If you don't like it, you know what you can do," Ackley said. What a witty guy. "How 'bout turning off the goddam light?"

I didn't turn it off right away, though. I just kept laying there on Ely's bed, thinking about Jane and all. It just drove me stark staring mad when I thought about her and Stradlater parked somewhere in that fat-assed Ed Banky's car. Every time I thought about it, I felt like jumping out the window. The thing is, you didn't know Stradlater. I knew him. Most guys at Pencey just *talked* about having sexual intercourse with girls all the time—like Ackley, for instance—but old Stradlater really did it. I was personally acquainted

with at least two girls he gave the time to. That's the truth.

"Tell me the story of your fascinating life, Ackley kid," I said.

"How 'bout turning off the goddam light? I gotta get up for Mass in the morning."

I got up and turned it off, if it made him happy. Then I laid down on Ely's bed again.

"What're ya gonna do—sleep in Ely's bed?" Ackley said. He was the perfect host, boy.

"I may. I may not. Don't worry about it."

"I'm not *worried* about it. Only, I'd hate like hell if Ely came in all of a sudden and found some guy—"

"Relax. I'm not gonna sleep here. I wouldn't abuse your goddam hospitality."

A couple of minutes later, he was snoring like mad. I kept laying there in the dark anyway, though, trying not to think about old Jane and Stradlater in that goddam Ed Banky's car. But it was almost impossible. The trouble was, I knew that guy Stradlater's technique. That made it even worse. We once double-dated, in Ed Banky's car, and Stradlater was in the back, with his date, and I was in the front with mine. What a technique that guy had. What he'd do was, he'd start snowing his date in this very quiet, *sincere* voice—like as if he wasn't only a very handsome guy but a nice, *sincere* guy, too. I damn near puked, listening to him. His date kept saying, "No—*please*. Please, don't. *Please*." But old Stradlater kept snowing her in this Abraham Lincoln, *sincere* voice, and finally there'd be this terrific silence in the back of the car. It was really embarrassing. I don't think he gave that girl the time that night—but damn near. *Damn* near.

While I was laying there trying not to think, I heard old Stradlater come back from the can and go in our room. You could hear him putting away his crumby toilet articles and all, and opening the window. He was a fresh-air fiend. Then, a little while later, he

turned off the light. He didn't even look around to see where I was at.

It was even depressing out in the street. You couldn't even hear any cars any more. I got feeling so lonesome and rotten, I even felt like waking Ackley up.

"Hey, Ackley," I said, in sort of a whisper, so Stradlater couldn't hear me through the shower curtain.

Ackley didn't hear me, though.

"Hey, Ackley!"

He still didn't hear me. He slept like a rock.

"Hey, Ackley!"

He heard that, all right.

"What the hell's the matter with you?" he said. "I was asleep, for Chrissake."

"Listen. What's the routine on joining a monastery?" I asked him. I was sort of toying with the idea of joining one. "Do you have to be a Catholic and all?"

"Certainly you have to be a Catholic. You bastard, did you wake me just to ask me a dumb ques—"

"Aah, go back to sleep. I'm not gonna join one anyway. The kind of luck I have, I'd probably join one with all the wrong kind of monks in it. All stupid bastards. Or just bastards."

When I said that, old Ackley sat way the hell up in bed. "Listen," he said, "I don't care what you say about *me* or anything, but if you start making cracks about my goddam religion, for Chrissake—"

"Relax," I said. "Nobody's making any cracks about your goddam religion." I got up off Ely's bed, and started towards the door. I didn't want to hang around in that stupid atmosphere any more. I stopped on the way, though, and picked up Ackley's hand, and gave him a big, phony handshake. He pulled it away from me. "What's the idea?" he said.

"No idea. I just want to thank you for being such a goddam prince, that's all," I said. I said it in this very sincere voice. "You're aces, Ackley kid," I said. "You know that?"

"Wise guy. Someday somebody's gonna bash your—"

I didn't even bother to listen to him. I shut the damn door and went out in the corridor.

Everybody was asleep or out or home for the week end, and it was very, very quiet and depressing in the corridor. There was this empty box of Kolynos toothpaste outside Leahy and Hoffman's door, and while I walked down towards the stairs, I kept giving it a boot with this sheeplined slipper I had on. What I thought I'd do, I thought I might go down and see what old Mal Brossard was doing. But all of a sudden, I changed my mind. All of a sudden, I decided what I'd really do, I'd get the hell out of Pencey—right that same night and all. I mean not wait till Wednesday or anything. I just didn't want to hang around any more. It made me too sad and lonesome. So what I decided to do, I decided I'd take a room in a hotel in New York—some very inexpensive hotel and all—and just take it easy till Wednesday. Then, on Wednesday, I'd go home all rested up and feeling swell. I figured my parents probably wouldn't get old Thurmer's letter saying I'd been given the ax till maybe Tuesday or Wednesday. I didn't want to go home or anything till they got it and thoroughly digested it and all. I didn't want to be around when they *first* got it. My mother gets very hysterical. She's not too bad after she gets something thoroughly digested, though. Besides, I sort of needed a little vacation. My nerves were shot. They really were.

Anyway, that's what I decided I'd do. So I went back to the room and turned on the light, to start packing and all. I already had quite a few things packed. Old Stradlater didn't even wake up. I lit a cigarette and got all dressed and then I packed these two Gladstones I have. It only took me about two minutes. I'm a very rapid packer.

One thing about packing depressed me a little. I had to pack these brand-new ice skates my mother had

practically just sent me a couple of days before. That depressed me. I could see my mother going in Spaulding's and asking the salesman a million dopy questions—and here I was getting the ax again. It made me feel pretty sad. She bought me the wrong kind of skates—I wanted racing skates and she bought hockey—but it made me sad anyway. Almost every time somebody gives me a present, it ends up making me sad.

After I got all packed, I sort of counted my dough. I don't remember exactly how much I had, but I was pretty loaded. My grandmother'd just sent me a wad about a week before. I have this grandmother that's quite lavish with her dough. She doesn't have all her marbles any more—she's old as hell—and she keeps sending me money for my birthday about four times a year. Anyway, even though I was pretty loaded, I figured I could always use a few extra bucks. You never know. So what I did was, I went down the hall and woke up Frederick Woodruff, this guy I'd lent my typewriter to. I asked him how much he'd give me for it. He was a pretty wealthy guy. He said he didn't know. He said he didn't much want to buy it. Finally he bought it, though. It cost about ninety bucks, and all he bought it for was twenty. He was sore because I'd woke him up.

When I was all set to go, when I had my bags and all, I stood for a while next to the stairs and took a last look down the goddam corridor. I was sort of crying. I don't know why. I put my red hunting hat on, and turned the peak around to the back, the way I liked it, and then I yelled at the top of my goddam voice, "*Sleep tight, ya morons!*" I'll bet I woke up every bastard on the whole floor. Then I got the hell out. Some stupid guy had thrown peanut shells all over the stairs, and I damn near broke my crazy neck.

IT WAS TOO LATE to call up for a cab or anything, so I walked the whole way to the station. It wasn't too far, but it was cold as hell, and the snow made it hard for walking, and my Gladstones kept banging hell out of my legs. I sort of enjoyed the air and all, though. The only trouble was, the cold made my nose hurt, and right under my upper lip, where old Stradlater'd laid one on me. He'd smacked my lip right on my teeth, and it was pretty sore. My ears were nice and warm, though. That hat I bought had earlaps in it, and I put them on—I didn't give a damn how I looked. Nobody was around anyway. Everybody was in the sack.

I was quite lucky when I got to the station, because I only had to wait about ten minutes for a train. While I waited, I got some snow in my hand and washed my face with it. I still had quite a bit of blood on.

Usually I like riding on trains, especially at night, with the lights on and the windows so black, and one of those guys coming up the aisle selling coffee and sandwiches and magazines. I usually buy a ham sandwich and about four magazines. If I'm on a train at night, I can usually even read one of those dumb stories in a magazine without puking. You know. One of those stories with a lot of phony, lean-jawed guys named David in it, and a lot of phony girls named Linda or Marcia that are always lighting all the goddam Davids' pipes for them. I can even read one of those lousy stories on a train at night, usually. But this time, it was different. I just didn't feel like it. I just sort of sat and not did anything. All I did was take off my hunting hat and put it in my pocket.

All of a sudden, this lady got on at Trenton and sat down next to me. Practically the whole car was empty, because it was pretty late and all, but she sat down next to me, instead of an empty seat, because she had this big bag with her and I was sitting in the front seat. She stuck the bag right out in the middle of the aisle, where the conductor and everybody could trip over it. She had these orchids on, like she'd just been to a big party or something. She was around forty or forty-five, I guess, but she was very good-looking. Women kill me. They really do. I don't mean I'm oversexed or anything like that—although I am quite sexy. I just like them, I mean. They're always leaving their goddam bags out in the middle of the aisle.

Anyway, we were sitting there, and all of a sudden she said to me, "Excuse me, but isn't that a Pencey Prep sticker?" She was looking up at my suitcases, up on the rack.

"Yes, it is," I said. She was right. I did have a goddam Pencey sticker on one of my Gladstones. Very corny, I'll admit.

"Oh, do you go to Pencey?" she said. She had a nice voice. A nice telephone voice, mostly. She should've carried a goddam telephone around with her.

"Yes, I do," I said.

"Oh, how lovely! Perhaps you know my son, then, Ernest Morrow? He goes to Pencey."

"Yes, I do. He's in my class."

Her son was doubtless the biggest bastard that ever went to Pencey, in the whole crummy history of the school. He was always going down the corridor, after he'd had a shower, snapping his soggy old wet towel at people's asses. That's exactly the kind of a guy he was.

"Oh, how nice!" the lady said. But not corny. She was just nice and all. "I must tell Ernest we met," she said. "May I ask your name, dear?"

"Rudolf Schmidt," I told her. I didn't feel like giving

her my whole life history. Rudolf Schmidt was the name of the janitor of our dorm.

"Do you like Pencey?" she asked me.

"Pencey? It's not too bad. It's not *paradise* or anything, but it's as good as most schools. Some of the faculty are pretty conscientious."

"Ernest just adores it."

"I know he does," I said. Then I started shooting the old crap around a little bit. "He adapts himself very well to things. He really does. I mean he really knows how to adapt himself."

"Do you think so?" she asked me. She sounded interested as hell.

"Ernest? Sure," I said. Then I watched her take off her gloves. Boy, was she lousy with rocks.

"I just broke a nail, getting out of a cab," she said. She looked up at me and sort of smiled. She had a terrifically nice smile. She really did. Most people have hardly any smile at all, or a lousy one. "Ernest's father and I sometimes worry about him," she said. "We sometimes feel he's not a terribly good mixer."

"How do you mean?"

"Well. He's a very sensitive boy. He's really never been a terribly good mixer with other boys. Perhaps he takes things a little more seriously than he should at his age."

Sensitive. That killed me. That guy Morrow was about as sensitive as a goddam toilet seat.

I gave her a good look. She didn't look like any dope to me. She looked like she might have a pretty damn good idea what a bastard she was the mother of. But you can't always tell—with somebody's mother, I mean. Mothers are all slightly insane. The thing is, though, I liked old Morrow's mother. She was all right.

"Would you care for a cigarette?" I asked her.

She looked all around. "I don't believe this is a smoker, Rudolf," she said. Rudolf. That killed me.

"That's all right. We can smoke till they start

screaming at us," I said. She took a cigarette off me, and I gave her a light.

She looked nice, smoking. She inhaled and all, but she didn't *wolf* the smoke down, the way most women around her age do. She had a lot of charm. She had quite a lot of sex appeal, too, if you really want to know.

She was looking at me sort of funny. "I may be wrong, but I believe your nose is bleeding, dear," she said, all of a sudden.

I nodded and took out my handkerchief. "I got hit with a snowball," I said. "One of those very icy ones." I probably would've told her what really happened, but it would've taken too long. I liked her, though. I was beginning to feel sort of sorry I'd told her my name was Rudolf Schmidt. "Old Ernie," I said. "He's one of the most popular boys at Pencey. Did you know that?"

"No, I didn't."

I nodded. "It really took everybody quite a long time to get to know him. He's a funny guy. A *strange* guy, in lots of ways—know what I mean? Like when I first met him. When I first met him, I thought he was kind of a snobbish person. That's what I thought. But he isn't. He's just got this very original personality that takes you a little while to get to know him."

Old Mrs. Morrow didn't say anything, but boy, you should've seen her. I had her glued to her seat. You take somebody's mother, all they want to hear about is what a hot-shot their son is.

Then I *really* started chucking the old crap around. "Did he tell you about the elections?" I asked her. "The class elections?"

She shook her head. I had her in a trance, like. I really did.

"Well, a bunch of us wanted old Ernie to be president of the class. I mean he was the unanimous choice. I mean he was the only boy that could really handle

the job," I said—boy, was I chucking it. "But this other boy—Harry Fencer—was elected. And the *reason* he was elected, the simple and obvious reason, was because Ernie wouldn't let us nominate him. Because he's so darn shy and modest and all. He *refused*. . . . Boy, he's *really* shy. You oughta make him try to get over that." I looked at her. "Didn't he tell you about it?"

"No, he didn't."

I nodded. "That's Ernie. He wouldn't. That's the one fault with him—he's too shy and modest. You really oughta get him to try to relax occasionally."

Right that minute, the conductor came around for old Mrs. Morrow's ticket, and it gave me a chance to quit shooting it. I'm glad I shot it for a while, though. You take a guy like Morrow that's always snapping their towel at people's asses—really trying to *hurt* somebody with it—they don't just stay a rat while they're a kid. They stay a rat their whole life. But I'll bet, after all the crap I shot, Mrs. Morrow'll keep thinking of him now as this very shy, modest guy that wouldn't let us nominate him for president. She might. You can't tell. Mothers aren't too sharp about that stuff.

"Would you care for a cocktail?" I asked her. I was feeling in the mood for one myself. "We can go in the club car. All right?"

"Dear, are you allowed to order drinks?" she asked me. Not snotty, though. She was too charming and all to be snotty.

"Well, no, not exactly, but I can usually get them on account of my height," I said. "And I have quite a bit of gray hair." I turned sideways and showed her my gray hair. It fascinated hell out of her. "C'mon, join me, why don't you?" I said. I'd've enjoyed having her.

"I really don't think I'd better. Thank you so much, though, dear," she said. "Anyway, the club car's most likely closed. It's quite late, you know." She was right. I'd forgotten all about what time it was.

Then she looked at me and asked me what I was

afraid she was going to ask me. "Ernest wrote that he'd be home on Wednesday, that Christmas vacation would start on Wednesday," she said. "I hope you weren't called home suddenly because of illness in the family." She really looked worried about it. She wasn't just being nosy, you could tell.

"No, everybody's fine at home," I said. "It's me. I have to have this operation."

"Oh! I'm so sorry," she said. She really was, too. I was right away sorry I'd said it, but it was too late.

"It isn't very serious. I have this tiny little tumor on the brain."

"Oh, *no!*" She put her hand up to her mouth and all.

"Oh, I'll be all right and everything! It's right near the outside. And it's a very tiny one. They can take it out in about two minutes."

Then I started reading this timetable I had in my pocket. Just to stop lying. Once I get started, I can go on for hours if I feel like it. No kidding. *Hours.*

We didn't talk too much after that. She started reading this *Vogue* she had with her, and I looked out the window for a while. She got off at Newark. She wished me a lot of luck with the operation and all. She kept calling me Rudolf. Then she invited me to visit Ernie during the summer, at Gloucester, Massachusetts. She said their house was right on the beach, and they had a tennis court and all, but I just thanked her and told her I was going to South America with my grandmother. Which was really a hot one, because my grandmother hardly ever even goes out of the *house*, except maybe to go to a goddam matinee or something. But I wouldn't visit that sonuvabitch Morrow for all the dough in the world, even if I was desperate.

THE FIRST THING I did when I got off at Penn Station, I went into this phone booth. I felt like giving somebody a buzz. I left my bags right outside the booth so that I could watch them, but as soon as I was inside, I couldn't think of anybody to call up. My brother D.B. was in Hollywood. My kid sister Phoebe goes to bed around nine o'clock—so I couldn't call *her* up. She wouldn't've cared if I'd woke her up, but the trouble was, she wouldn't've been the one that answered the phone. My parents would be the ones. So that was out. Then I thought of giving Jane Gallagher's mother a buzz, and find out when Jane's vacation started, but I didn't feel like it. Besides, it was pretty late to call up. Then I thought of calling this girl I used to go around with quite frequently, Sally Hayes, because I knew her Christmas vacation had started already—she'd written me this long, phony letter, inviting me over to help her trim the Christmas tree Christmas Eve and all—but I was afraid her mother'd answer the phone. Her mother knew my mother, and I could picture her breaking a goddam leg to get to the phone and tell my mother I was in New York. Besides, I wasn't crazy about talking to old Mrs. Hayes on the phone. She once told Sally I was wild. She said I was wild and that I had no direction in life. Then I thought of calling up this guy that went to the Whooton School when I was there, Carl Luce, but I didn't like him much. So I ended up not calling anybody. I came out of the booth, after about twenty minutes or so, and got my bags and walked over to that tunnel where the cabs are and got a cab.



I'm so damn absent-minded, I gave the driver my regular address, just out of habit and all—I mean I completely forgot I was going to shack up in a hotel for a couple of days and not go home till vacation started. I didn't think of it till we were halfway through the park. Then I said, "Hey, do you mind turning around when you get a chance? I gave you the wrong address. I want to go back downtown."

The driver was sort of a wise guy. "I can't turn around here, Mac. This here's a one-way. I'll have to go all the way to Ninetieth Street now."

I didn't want to start an argument. "Okay," I said. Then I thought of something, all of a sudden. "Hey, listen," I said. "You know those ducks in that lagoon right near Central Park South? That little lake? By any chance, do you happen to know where they go, the ducks, when it gets all frozen over? Do you happen to know, by any chance?" I realized it was only one chance in a million.

He turned around and looked at me like I was a madman. "What're ya tryna do, bud?" he said. "Kid me?"

"No—I was just interested, that's all."

He didn't say anything more, so I didn't either. Until we came out of the park at Ninetieth Street. Then he said, "All right, buddy. Where to?"

"Well, the thing is, I don't want to stay at any hotels on the East Side where I might run into some acquaintances of mine. I'm traveling incognito," I said. I hate saying corny things like "traveling incognito." But when I'm with somebody that's corny, I always act corny too. "Do you happen to know whose band's at the Taft or the New Yorker, by any chance?"

"No idear, Mac."

"Well—take me to the Edmont then," I said. "Would you care to stop on the way and join me for a cocktail? On me. I'm loaded."

"Can't do it, Mac. Sorry." He certainly was good company. Terrific personality.

We got to the Edmont Hotel, and I checked in. I'd put on my red hunting cap when I was in the cab, just for the hell of it, but I took it off before I checked in. I didn't want to look like a screwball or something. Which is really ironic. I didn't *know* then that the goddam hotel was full of perverts and morons. Screwballs all over the place.

They gave me this very crumby room, with nothing to look out of the window at except the other side of the hotel. I didn't care much. I was too depressed to care whether I had a good view or not. The bellboy that showed me to the room was this very old guy around sixty-five. He was even more depressing than the room was. He was one of those bald guys that comb all their hair over from the side to cover up the baldness. I'd rather be bald than do that. Anyway, what a gorgeous job for a guy around sixty-five years old. Carrying people's suitcases and waiting around for a tip. I suppose he wasn't too intelligent or anything, but it was terrible anyway.

After he left, I looked out the window for a while, with my coat on and all. I didn't have anything else to do. You'd be surprised what was going on on the other side of the hotel. They didn't even bother to pull their shades down. I saw one guy, a gray-haired, very distinguished-looking guy with only his shorts on, do something you wouldn't believe me if I told you. First he put his suitcase on the bed. Then he took out all these women's clothes, and put them on. Real women's clothes—silk stockings, high-heeled shoes, brassière, and one of those corsets with the straps hanging down and all. Then he put on this very tight black evening dress. I swear to God. Then he started walking up and down the room, taking these very small steps, the way a woman does, and smoking a cigarette and looking at himself in the mirror. He was all alone, too. Unless

somebody was in the bathroom—I couldn't see that much. Then, in the window almost right over his, I saw a man and a woman squirting water out of their mouths at each other. It probably was highballs, not water, but I couldn't see what they had in their glasses. Anyway, first he'd take a swallow and squirt it all over *her*, then she did it to *him*—they took *turns*, for God's sake. You should've seen them. They were in hysterics the whole time, like it was the funniest thing that ever happened. I'm not kidding, the hotel was lousy with perverts. I was probably the only normal bastard in the whole place—and that isn't saying much. I damn near sent a telegram to old Stradlater telling him to take the first train to New York. He'd have been the king of the hotel.

The trouble was, that kind of junk is sort of fascinating to watch, even if you don't want it to be. For instance, that girl that was getting water squirted all over her face, she was pretty good-looking. I mean that's my big trouble. In my *mind*, I'm probably the biggest sex maniac you ever saw. Sometimes I can think of *very* crumby stuff I wouldn't mind doing if the opportunity came up. I can even see how it might be quite a lot of fun, in a crumby way, and if you were both sort of drunk and all, to get a girl and squirt water or something all over each other's face. The thing is, though, I don't *like* the idea. It stinks, if you analyze it. I think if you don't really like a girl, you shouldn't horse around with her at all, and if you *do* like her, then you're supposed to like her face, and if you like her face, you ought to be careful about doing crumby stuff to it, like squirting water all over it. It's really too bad that so much crumby stuff is a lot of fun sometimes. Girls aren't too much help, either, when you start trying not to get *too* crumby, when you start trying not to spoil anything really good. I knew this one girl, a couple of years ago, that was even crumbier than I was. Boy, was she crumby! We had a

lot of fun, though, for a while, in a crumby way. Sex is something I really don't understand too hot. You never know *where* the hell you are. I keep making up these sex rules for myself, and then I break them right away. Last year I made a rule that I was going to quit horsing around with girls that, deep down, gave me a pain in the ass. I broke it, though, the same week I made it—the same *night*, as a matter of fact. I spent the whole night necking with a terrible phony named Anne Louise Sherman. Sex is something I just don't understand. I swear to God I don't.

I started toying with the idea, while I kept standing there, of giving old Jane a buzz—I mean calling her long distance at B.M., where she went, instead of calling up her mother to find out when she was coming home. You weren't supposed to call students up late at night, but I had it all figured out. I was going to tell whoever answered the phone that I was her uncle. I was going to say her aunt had just got killed in a car accident and I had to speak to her immediately. It would've worked, too. The only reason I didn't do it was because I wasn't in the mood. If you're not in the mood, you can't do that stuff right.

After a while I sat down in a chair and smoked a couple of cigarettes. I was feeling pretty horny. I have to admit it. Then, all of a sudden, I got this idea. I took out my wallet and started looking for this address a guy I met at a party last summer, that went to Princeton, gave me. Finally I found it. It was all a funny color from my wallet, but you could still read it. It was the address of this girl that wasn't exactly a whore or anything but that didn't mind doing it once in a while, this Princeton guy told me. He brought her to a dance at Princeton once, and they nearly kicked him out for bringing her. She used to be a burlesque stripper or something. Anyway, I went over to the phone and gave her a buzz. Her name was Faith Cav-

endish, and she lived at the Stanford Arms Hotel on Sixty-fifth and Broadway. A dump, no doubt.

For a while, I didn't think she was home or something. Nobody kept answering. Then, finally, somebody picked up the phone.

"Hello?" I said. I made my voice quite deep so that she wouldn't suspect my age or anything. I have a pretty deep voice anyway.

"Hello," this woman's voice said. None too friendly, either.

"Is this Miss Faith Cavendish?"

"Who's *this*?" she said. "Who's calling me up at this crazy goddam hour?"

That sort of scared me a little bit. "Well, I know it's quite late," I said, in this very mature voice and all. "I hope you'll forgive me, but I was very anxious to get in touch with you." I said it suave as hell. I really did.

"Who *is* this?" she said.

"Well, you don't know me, but I'm a friend of Eddie Birdsell's. He suggested that if I were in town sometime, we ought to get together for a cocktail or two."

"Who? You're a friend of *who*?" Boy, she was a real tigress over the phone. She was damn near yelling at me.

"Edmund Birdsell. Eddie Birdsell," I said. I couldn't remember if his name was Edmund or Edward. I only met him once, at a goddam stupid party.

"I don't know anybody by that name, Jack. And if you think I *enjoy* bein' woke up in the middle—"

"Eddie Birdsell? From Princeton?" I said.

You could tell she was running the name over in her mind and all.

"Birdsell, Birdsell . . . from Princeton . . . Princeton College?"

"That's right," I said.

"You from Princeton College?"

"Well, approximately."

"Oh . . . How *is* Eddie?" she said. "This is certainly

a peculiar time to call a person up, though. Jesus Christ."

"He's fine. He asked to be remembered to you."

"Well, thank you. Remember me to *him*," she said.

"He's a grand person. What's he doing now?" She was getting friendly as hell, all of a sudden.

"Oh, you know. Same old stuff," I said. How the hell did I know what he was doing? I hardly knew the guy. I didn't even know if he was still at Princeton. "Look," I said. "Would you be interested in meeting me for a cocktail somewhere?"

"By any chance do you have any idea what *time* it is?" she said. "What's your name, anyhow, may I ask?" She was getting an English accent, all of a sudden. "You sound a little on the young side."

I laughed. "Thank you for the compliment," I said—suave as hell. "Holden Caulfield's my name." I should've given her a phony name, but I didn't think of it.

"Well, look, Mr. Cawffle. I'm not in the habit of making engagements in the middle of the night. I'm a working gal."

"Tomorrow's Sunday," I told her.

"Well, *anyway*. I gotta get my beauty sleep. You know how it is."

"I thought we might have just one cocktail together. It isn't too late."

"Well. You're very sweet," she said. "Where ya callin' from? Where ya at now, anyways?"

"Me? I'm in a phone booth."

"Oh," she said. Then there was this very long pause.

"Well, I'd like awfully to get together with you sometime, Mr. Cawffle. You sound very attractive. You sound like a very attractive person. But it *is* late."

"I could come up to your place."

"Well, ordinary, I'd say grand. I mean I'd love to have you drop up for a cocktail, but my roommate happens to be ill. She's been laying here all night with-

out a wink of sleep. She just this minute closed her eyes and all. I mean."

"Oh. That's too bad."

"Where ya stopping at? Perhaps we could get together for cocktails tomorrow."

"I can't make it tomorrow," I said. "Tonight's the only time I can make it." What a dope I was. I shouldn't've said that.

"Oh. Well, I'm awfully sorry."

"I'll say hello to Eddie for you."

"Willya do that? I hope you enjoy your stay in New York. It's a grand place."

"I know it is. Thanks. Good night," I said. Then I hung up.

Boy, I *really* fouled that up. I should've at least made it for cocktails or something.

## 10

IT WAS still pretty early. I'm not sure what time it was, but it wasn't too late. The one thing I hate to do is go to bed when I'm not even tired. So I opened my suitcases and took out a clean shirt, and then I went in the bathroom and washed and changed my shirt. What I thought I'd do, I thought I'd go downstairs and see what the hell was going on in the Lavender Room. They had this night club, the Lavender Room, in the hotel.

While I was changing my shirt, I damn near gave my kid sister Phoebe a buzz, though. I certainly felt like talking to her on the phone. Somebody with sense and all. But I couldn't take a chance on giving her a buzz, because she was only a little kid and she wouldn't have been up, let alone anywhere near the

phone. I thought of maybe hanging up if my parents answered, but that wouldn't've worked, either. They'd know it was me. My mother always knows it's me. She's psychic. But I certainly wouldn't have minded shooting the crap with old Phoebe for a while.

You should see her. You never saw a little kid so pretty and smart in your whole life. She's really smart. I mean she's had all A's ever since she started school. As a matter of fact, I'm the only dumb one in the family. My brother D.B.'s a writer and all, and my brother Allie, the one that died, that I told you about, was a wizard. I'm the only really dumb one. But you ought to see old Phoebe. She has this sort of red hair, a little bit like Allie's was, that's very short in the summertime. In the summertime, she sticks it behind her ears. She has nice, pretty little ears. In the wintertime, it's pretty long, though. Sometimes my mother braids it and sometimes she doesn't. It's really nice, though. She's only ten. She's quite skinny, like me, but nice skinny. Roller-skate skinny. I watched her once from the window when she was crossing over Fifth Avenue to go to the park, and that's what she is, roller-skate skinny. You'd like her. I mean if you tell old Phoebe something, she knows exactly what the hell you're talking about. I mean you can even take her anywhere with you. If you take her to a lousy movie, for instance, she knows it's a lousy movie. If you take her to a pretty good movie, she knows it's a pretty good movie. D.B. and I took her to see this French movie, *The Baker's Wife*, with Raimu in it. It killed her. Her favorite is *The 39 Steps*, though, with Robert Donat. She knows the whole goddam movie by heart, because I've taken her to see it about ten times. When old Donat comes up to this Scotch farmhouse, for instance, when he's running away from the cops and all, Phoebe'll say right out loud in the movie—right when the Scotch guy in the picture says it—"Can you eat the herring?" She knows all the talk by heart. And when

this professor in the picture, that's really a German spy, sticks up his little finger with part of the middle joint missing, to show Robert Donat, old Phoebe beats him to it—she holds up *her* little finger at me in the dark, right in front of my face. She's all right. You'd like her. The only trouble is, she's a little too affectionate sometimes. She's very emotional, for a child. She really is. Something else she does, she writes books all the time. Only, she doesn't finish them. They're all about some kid named Hazel Weatherfield—only old Phoebe spells it "Hazle." Old Hazle Weatherfield is a girl detective. She's supposed to be an orphan, but her old man keeps showing up. Her old man's always a "tall attractive gentleman about 20 years of age." That kills me. Old Phoebe. I swear to God you'd like her. She was smart even when she was a very tiny little kid. When she was a very tiny little kid, I and Allie used to take her to the park with us, especially on Sundays. Allie had this sailboat he used to like to fool around with on Sundays, and we used to take old Phoebe with us. She'd wear white gloves and walk right between us, like a lady and all. And when Allie and I were having some conversation about things in general, old Phoebe'd be listening. Sometimes you'd forget she was around, because she was such a little kid, but *she'd* let you know. She'd interrupt you all the time. She'd give Allie or I a push or something, and say, "*Who?*" Who said that? Bobby or the lady?" And we'd tell her who said it, and she'd say, "Oh," and go right on listening and all. She killed Allie, too. I mean he liked her, too. She's ten now, and not such a tiny little kid any more, but she still kills everybody—everybody with any sense, anyway.

Anyway, she was somebody you always felt like talking to on the phone. But I was too afraid my parents would answer, and then they'd find out I was in New York and kicked out of Pencey and all. So I just finished putting on my shirt. Then I got all ready and

went down in the elevator to the lobby to see what was going on.

Except for a few pimpy-looking guys, and a few whory-looking blondes, the lobby was pretty empty. But you could hear the band playing in the Lavender Room, and so I went in there. It wasn't very crowded, but they gave me a lousy table anyway—way in the back. I should've waved a buck under the head-waiter's nose. In New York, boy, money really talks—I'm not kidding.

The band was putrid. Buddy Singer. Very brassy, but not good brassy—corny brassy. Also, there were very few people around my age in the place. In fact, nobody was around my age. They were mostly old, show-offy-looking guys with their dates. Except at the table right next to me. At the table right next to me, there were these three girls around thirty or so. The whole three of them were pretty ugly, and they all had on the kind of hats that you knew they didn't really live in New York, but one of them, the blonde one, wasn't too bad. She was sort of cute, the blonde one, and I started giving her the old eye a little bit, but just then the waiter came up for my order. I ordered a Scotch and soda, and told him not to mix it—I said it fast as hell, because if you hem and haw, they think you're under twenty-one and won't sell you any intoxicating liquor. I had trouble with him anyway, though. "I'm sorry, sir," he said, "but do you have some verification of your age? Your driver's license, perhaps?"

I gave him this very cold stare, like he'd insulted the hell out of me, and asked him, "Do I look like I'm under twenty-one?"

"I'm sorry, sir, but we have our—"

"Okay, okay," I said. I figured the hell with it. "Bring me a Coke." He started to go away, but I called him back. "Can'tcha stick a little rum in it or something?" I asked him. I asked him very nicely and all.

"I can't sit in a corny place like this cold *sober*. Can'tcha stick a little rum in it or something?"

"I'm very sorry, sir . . ." he said, and beat it on me. I didn't hold it against him, though. They lose their jobs if they get caught selling to a minor. I'm a goddam minor.

I started giving the three witches at the next table the eye again. That is, the blonde one. The other two were strictly from hunger. I didn't do it crudely, though. I just gave all three of them this very cool glance and all. What they did, though, the three of them, when I did it, they started giggling like morons. They probably thought I was too young to give anybody the once-over. That annoyed hell out of me—you'd've thought I wanted to *marry* them or something. I should've given them the freeze, after they did that, but the trouble was, I really felt like dancing. I'm very fond of dancing, sometimes, and that was one of the times. So all of a sudden, I sort of leaned over and said, "Would any of you girls care to dance?" I didn't ask them crudely or anything. Very suave, in fact. But God damn it, they thought *that* was a panic, too. They started giggling some more. I'm not kidding, they were three real morons. "C'mon," I said. "I'll dance with you one at a time. All right? How 'bout it? C'mon!" I really felt like dancing.

Finally, the blonde one got up to dance with me, because you could tell I was really talking to *her*, and we walked out to the dance floor. The other two grools nearly had hysterics when we did. I certainly must've been very hard up to even bother with any of them.

But it was worth it. The blonde was some dancer. She was one of the best dancers I ever danced with. I'm not kidding, some of these very stupid girls can really knock you out on a dance floor. You take a really smart girl, and half the time she's trying to lead *you* around the dance floor, or else she's such a lousy

dancer, the best thing to do is stay at the table and just get drunk with her.

"You really can dance," I told the blonde one. "You oughta be a pro. I mean it. I danced with a pro once, and you're twice as good as she was. Did you ever hear of Marco and Miranda?"

"What?" she said. She wasn't even listening to me. She was looking all around the place.

"I said did you ever hear of Marco and Miranda?"

"I don't know. No. I don't know."

"Well, they're dancers, she's a dancer. She's not too hot, though. She does everything she's *supposed* to, but she's not so hot anyway. You know when a girl's really a terrific dancer?"

"Wudga say?" she said. She wasn't listening to me, even. Her mind was wandering all over the place.

"I said do you know when a girl's really a terrific dancer?"

"Uh-uh."

"Well—where I have my hand on your back. If I think there isn't anything underneath my hand—no can, no legs, no feet, no *anything*—then the girl's really a terrific dancer."

She wasn't listening, though. So I ignored her for a while. We just danced. God, could that dopey girl dance. Buddy Singer and his stinking band was playing "Just One of Those Things" and even *they* couldn't ruin it entirely. It's a swell song. I didn't try any trick stuff while we danced—I hate a guy that does a lot of show-off tricky stuff on the dance floor—but I was moving her around plenty, and she stayed with me. The funny thing is, I thought she was enjoying it, too, till all of a sudden she came out with this very dumb remark. "I and my girl friends saw Peter Lorre last night," she said. "The movie actor. In person. He was buyin' a newspaper. He's *cute*."

"You're lucky," I told her. "You're really lucky. You know that?" She was really a moron. But what a

dancer. I could hardly stop myself from sort of giving her a kiss on the top of her dopey head—you know—right where the part is, and all. She got sore when I did it.

"Hey! What's the idea?"

"Nothing. No idea. You really can dance," I said. "I have a kid sister that's only in the goddam fourth grade. You're about as good as she is, and she can dance better than anybody living or dead."

"Watch your language, if you don't mind."

What a lady, boy. A *queen*, for Chrissake.

"Where you girls from?" I asked her.

She didn't answer me, though. She was busy looking around for old Peter Lorre to show up, I guess.

"Where you girls from?" I asked her again.

"What?" she said.

"Where you girls from? Don't answer if you don't feel like it. I don't want you to strain yourself."

"Seattle, Washington," she said. She was doing me a big favor to tell me.

"You're a very good conversationalist," I told her. "You know that?"

"What?"

I let it drop. It was over her head, anyway. "Do you feel like jitterbugging a little bit, if they play a fast one? Not corny jitterbug, not jump or anything—just nice and easy. Everybody'll all sit down when they play a fast one, except the old guys and the fat guys, and we'll have plenty of room. Okay?"

"It's immaterial to me," she said. "Hey—how old are you, anyhow?"

That annoyed me, for some reason. "Oh, Christ. Don't spoil it," I said. "I'm twelve, for Chrissake. I'm big for my age."

"Listen. I toleja about that. I don't like that type language," she said. "If you're gonna use that type language, I can go sit down with my girl friends, you know."

I apologized like a madman, because the band was starting a fast one. She started jitterbugging with me—but just very nice and easy, not corny. She was really good. All you had to do was touch her. And when she turned around, her pretty little butt twitched so nice and all. She knocked me out. I mean it. I was half in love with her by the time we sat down. That's the thing about girls. Every time they do something pretty, even if they're not much to look at, or even if they're sort of stupid, you fall half in love with them, and then you never know *where* the hell you are. Girls. Jesus Christ. They can drive you crazy. They really can.

They didn't invite me to sit down at their table—mostly because they were too ignorant—but I sat down anyway. The blonde I'd been dancing with's name was Bernice something—Crabs or Krebs. The two ugly ones' names were Marty and Laverne. I told them my name was Jim Steele, just for the hell of it. Then I tried to get them in a little intelligent conversation, but it was practically impossible. You had to twist their arms. You could hardly tell which was the stupidest of the three of them. And the whole three of them kept looking all around the goddam room, like as if they expected a flock of goddam *movie stars* to come in any minute. They probably thought movie stars always hung out in the Lavender Room when they came to New York, instead of the Stork Club or El Morocco and all. Anyway, it took me about a half hour to find out where they all worked and all in Seattle. They all worked in the same insurance office. I asked them if they liked it, but do you think you could get an intelligent answer out of those three dopes? I thought the two ugly ones, Marty and Laverne, were sisters, but they got very insulted when I asked them. You could tell neither one of them wanted to look like the other one, and you couldn't blame them, but it was very amusing anyway.

I danced with them all—the whole three of them—

one at a time. The one ugly one, Laverne, wasn't too bad a dancer, but the other one, old Marty, was murder. Old Marty was like dragging the Statue of Liberty around the floor. The only way I could even half enjoy myself dragging her around was if I amused myself a little. So I told her I just saw Gary Cooper, the movie star, on the other side of the floor.

"Where?" she asked me—excited as hell. "Where?"

"Aw, you just missed him. He just went out. Why didn't you look when I told you?"

She practically stopped dancing, and started looking over everybody's heads to see if she could see him. "Oh, shoot!" she said. I'd just about broken her heart—I really had. I was sorry as hell I'd kidded her. Some people you shouldn't kid, even if they deserve it.

Here's what was very funny, though. When we got back to the table, old Marty told the other two that Gary Cooper had just gone out. Boy, old Laverne and Bernice nearly committed suicide when they heard that. They got all excited and asked Marty if she'd seen him and all. Old Mart said she'd only caught a glimpse of him. That killed me.

The bar was closing up for the night, so I bought them all two drinks apiece quick before it closed, and I ordered two more Cokes for myself. The goddam table was lousy with glasses. The one ugly one, Laverne, kept kidding me because I was only drinking Cokes. She had a sterling sense of humor. She and old Marty were drinking Tom Collinses—in the middle of December, for God's sake. They didn't know any better. The blonde one, old Bernice, was drinking bourbon and water. She was really putting it away, too. The whole three of them kept looking for movie stars the whole time. They hardly talked—even to each other. Old Marty talked more than the other two. She kept saying these very corny, boring things, like calling the can the "little girls' room," and she thought Buddy Singer's poor old beat-up clarinet player was

really terrific when he stood up and took a couple of ice-cold hot licks. She called his clarinet a "licorice stick." Was she corny. The other ugly one, Laverne, thought she was a very witty type. She kept asking me to call up my father and ask him what he was doing tonight. She kept asking me if my father had a date or not. *Four times* she asked me that—she was certainly witty. Old Bernice, the blonde one, didn't say hardly anything at all. Every time I'd ask her something, she said "What?" That can get on your nerves after a while.

All of a sudden, when they finished their drink, all three of them stood up on me and said they had to get to bed. They said they were going to get up early to see the first show at Radio City Music Hall. I tried to get them to stick around for a while, but they wouldn't. So we said good-bye and all. I told them I'd look them up in Seattle sometime, if I ever got there, but I doubt if I ever will. Look them up, I mean.

With cigarettes and all, the check came to about thirteen bucks. I think they should've at least offered to pay for the drinks they had before I joined them—I wouldn't've *let* them, naturally, but they should've at least offered. I didn't care much, though. They were so ignorant, and they had those sad, fancy hats on and all. And that business about getting up early to see the first show at Radio City Music Hall depressed me. If somebody, some girl in an awful-looking hat, for instance, comes all the way to New York—from Seattle, Washington, for God's sake—and ends up getting up early in the morning to see the goddam first show at Radio City Music Hall, it makes me so depressed I can't stand it. I'd've bought the whole three of them a *hundred* drinks if only they hadn't told me that.

I left the Lavender Room pretty soon after they did. They were closing it up anyway, and the band had quit a long time ago. In the first place, it was one of those places that are very terrible to be in unless you



have somebody good to dance with, or unless the waiter lets you buy real drinks instead of just Cokes. There isn't any night club in the world you can sit in for a long time unless you can at least buy some liquor and get drunk. Or unless you're with some girl that really knocks you out.

## 11

ALL OF A SUDDEN, on my way out to the lobby, I got old Jane Gallagher on the brain again. I got her on, and I couldn't get her off. I sat down in this vomity-looking chair in the lobby and thought about her and Stradlater sitting in that goddam Ed Banky's car, and though I was pretty damn sure old Stradlater hadn't given her the time—I know old Jane like a book—I still couldn't get her off my brain. I knew her like a book. I really did. I mean, besides checkers, she was quite fond of all athletic sports, and after I got to know her, the whole summer long we played tennis together almost every morning and golf almost every afternoon. I really got to know her quite intimately. I don't mean it was anything *physical* or anything—it wasn't—but we saw each other all the time. You don't always have to get too sexy to get to know a girl.

The way I met her, this Doberman pinscher she had used to come over and relieve himself on our lawn, and my mother got very irritated about it. She called up Jane's mother and made a big stink about it. My mother can make a very big stink about that kind of stuff. Then what happened, a couple of days later I saw Jane laying on her stomach next to the swimming pool, at the club, and I said hello to her. I knew she lived in the house next to ours, but I'd never con-

versed with her before or anything. She gave me the big freeze when I said hello that day, though. I had a helluva time convincing her that I didn't give a good goddam *where* her dog relieved himself. He could do it in the living room, for all I cared. Anyway, after that, Jane and I got to be friends and all. I played golf with her that same afternoon. She lost eight balls, I remember. *Eight*. I had a terrible time getting her to at least open her eyes when she took a swing at the ball. I improved her game immensely, though. I'm a very good golfer. If I told you what I go around in, you probably wouldn't believe me. I almost was once in a movie short, but I changed my mind at the last minute. I figured that anybody that hates the movies as much as I do, I'd be a phony if I let them stick me in a movie short.

She was a funny girl, old Jane. I wouldn't exactly describe her as strictly beautiful. She knocked me out, though. She was sort of muckle-mouthed. I mean when she was talking and she got excited about something, her mouth sort of went in about fifty directions, her lips and all. That killed me. And she never really closed it all the way, her mouth. It was always just a little bit open, especially when she got in her golf stance, or when she was reading a book. She was always reading, and she read very good books. She read a lot of poetry and all. She was the only one, outside my family, that I ever showed Allie's baseball mitt to, with all the poems written on it. She'd never met Allie or anything, because that was her first summer in Maine—before that, she went to Cape Cod—but I told her quite a lot about him. She was interested in that kind of stuff.

My mother didn't like her too much. I mean my mother always thought Jane and her mother were sort of snubbing her or something when they didn't say hello. My mother saw them in the village a lot, because Jane used to drive to market with her mother in this

LaSalle convertible they had. My mother didn't think Jane was pretty, even. I did, though. I just liked the way she looked, that's all.

I remember this one afternoon. It was the only time old Jane and I ever got close to necking, even. It was a Saturday and it was raining like a bastard out, and I was over at her house, on the porch—they had this big screened-in porch. We were playing checkers. I used to kid her once in a while because she wouldn't take her kings out of the back row. But I didn't kid her much, though. You never wanted to kid Jane too much. I think I really like it best when you can kid the pants off a girl when the opportunity arises, but it's a funny thing. The girls I like best are the ones I never feel much like kidding. Sometimes I think they'd *like* it if you kidded them—in fact, I *know* they would—but it's hard to get started, once you've known them a pretty long time and never kidded them. Anyway, I was telling you about that afternoon Jane and I came close to necking. It was raining like hell and we were out on her porch, and all of a sudden this booze hound her mother was married to came out on the porch and asked Jane if there were any cigarettes in the house. I didn't know him too well or anything, but he looked like the kind of guy that wouldn't talk to you much unless he wanted something off you. He had a lousy personality. Anyway, old Jane wouldn't answer him when he asked her if she knew where there was any cigarettes. So the guy asked her again, but she still wouldn't answer him. She didn't even look up from the game. Finally the guy went inside the house. When he did, I asked Jane what the hell was going on. She wouldn't even answer *me*, then. She made out like she was concentrating on her next move in the game and all. Then all of a sudden, this tear plopped down on the checkerboard. On one of the red squares—boy, I can still see it. She just rubbed it into the board with her finger. I don't know why, but it

bothered hell out of me. So what I did was, I went over and made her move over on the glider so that I could sit down next to her—I practically sat down in her *lap*, as a matter of fact. Then she *really* started to cry, and the next thing I knew, I was kissing her all over—*anywhere*—her eyes, her *nose*, her forehead, her eyebrows and all, her *ears*—her whole face except her mouth and all. She sort of wouldn't let me get to her mouth. Anyway, it was the closest we ever got to necking. After a while, she got up and went in and put on this red and white sweater she had, that knocked me out, and we went to a goddam movie. I asked her, on the way, if Mr. Cudahy—that was the booze hound's name—had ever tried to get wise with her. She was pretty young, but she had this terrific figure, and I wouldn't've put it past that Cudahy bastard. She said no, though. I never did find out what the hell was the matter. Some girls you practically never find out what's the matter.

I don't want you to get the idea she was a goddam *icicle* or something, just because we never necked or horsed around much. She wasn't. I held hands with her all the time, for instance. That doesn't sound like much, I realize, but she was terrific to hold hands with. Most girls if you hold hands with them, their goddam hand *dies* on you, or else they think they have to keep *mooing* their hand all the time, as if they were afraid they'd bore you or something. Jane was different. We'd get into a goddam movie or something, and right away we'd start holding hands, and we wouldn't quit till the movie was over. And without changing the position or making a big deal out of it. You never even worried, with Jane, whether your hand was sweaty or not. All you knew was, you were happy. You really were.

One other thing I just thought of. One time, in this movie, Jane did something that just about knocked me out. The newsreel was on or something, and all of a sudden I felt this hand on the back of my neck, and it

was Jane's. It was a funny thing to do. I mean she was quite young and all, and most girls if you see them putting their hand on the back of somebody's neck, they're around twenty-five or thirty and usually they're doing it to their husband or their little kid—I do it to my kid sister Phoebe once in a while, for instance. But if a girl's quite young and all and she does it, it's so pretty it just about kills you.

Anyway, that's what I was thinking about while I sat in that vomity-looking chair in the lobby. Old Jane. Every time I got to the part about her out with Stradlater in that damn Ed Banky's car, it almost drove me crazy. I knew she wouldn't let him get to first base with her, but it drove me crazy anyway. I don't even like to talk about it, if you want to know the truth.

There was hardly anybody in the lobby any more. Even all the whory-looking blondes weren't around any more, and all of a sudden I felt like getting the hell out of the place. It was too depressing. And I wasn't tired or anything. So I went up to my room and put on my coat. I also took a look out the window to see if all the perverts were still in action, but the lights and all were out now. I went down in the elevator again and got a cab and told the driver to take me down to Ernie's. Ernie's is this night club in Greenwich Village that my brother D.B. used to go to quite frequently before he went out to Hollywood and prostituted himself. He used to take me with him once in a while. Ernie's a big fat colored guy that plays the piano. He's a terrific snob and he won't hardly even talk to you unless you're a big shot or a celebrity or something, but he can really play the piano. He's so good he's almost corny, in fact. I don't exactly know what I mean by that, but I mean it. I certainly like to hear him play, but sometimes you feel like turning his goddam piano over. I think it's because sometimes when he plays, he *sounds* like the kind of guy that won't talk to you unless you're a big shot.

THE CAB I HAD was a real old one that smelled like someone'd just tossed his cookies in it. I always get those vomity kind of cabs if I go anywhere late at night. What made it worse, it was so quiet and lonesome out, even though it was Saturday night. I didn't see hardly anybody on the street. Now and then you just saw a man and a girl crossing a street, with their arms around each other's waists and all, or a bunch of hoodlumpy-looking guys and their dates, all of them laughing like hyenas at something you could bet wasn't funny. New York's terrible when somebody laughs on the street very late at night. You can hear it for miles. It makes you feel so lonesome and depressed. I kept wishing I could go home and shoot the bull for a while with old Phoebe. But finally, after I was riding a while, the cab driver and I sort of struck up a conversation. His name was Horwitz. He was a much better guy than the other driver I'd had. Anyway, I thought maybe he might know about the ducks.

"Hey, Horwitz," I said. "You ever pass by the lagoon in Central Park? Down by Central Park South?"

"The *what*?"

"The lagoon. That little lake, like, there. Where the ducks are. You know."

"Yeah, what about it?"

"Well, you know the ducks that swim around in it? In the springtime and all? Do you happen to know where they go in the wintertime, by any chance?"

"Where *who* goes?"

"The ducks. Do you know, by any chance? I mean does somebody come around in a truck or something

and take them away, or do they fly away by themselves—go south or something?”

Old Horwitz turned all the way around and looked at me. He was a very impatient-type guy. He wasn't a bad guy, though. “How the hell should I know?” he said. “How the hell should I know a stupid thing like that?”

“Well, don't get *sore* about it,” I said. He was sore about it or something.

“Who's sore? Nobody's sore.”

I stopped having a conversation with him, if he was going to get so damn touchy about it. But he started it up again himself. He turned all the way around again, and said, “The *fish* don't go no place. They stay right where they are, the fish. Right in the goddam lake.”

“The fish—that's different. The fish is different. I'm talking about the *ducks*,” I said.

“What's *different* about it? Nothin's *different* about it,” Horwitz said. Everything he said, he sounded sore about something. “It's tougher for the *fish*, the winter and all, than it is for the ducks, for Chrissake. Use your head, for Chrissake.”

I didn't say anything for about a minute. Then I said, “All right. What do they do, the fish and all, when that whole little lake's a solid block of ice, people *skating* on it and all?”

Old Horwitz turned around again. “What the hell-aya mean what do they do?” he yelled at me. “They stay right where they are, for Chrissake.”

“They can't just ignore the ice. They can't just ignore it.”

“Who's ignoring it? Nobody's ignoring it!” Horwitz said. He got so damn excited and all, I was afraid he was going to drive the cab right into a lamppost or something. “They live right in the goddam ice. It's their nature, for Chrissake. They get frozen right in one position for the whole winter.”

“Yeah? What do they eat, then? I mean if they're

frozen *solid*, they can't swim around looking for *food* and all.”

“Their *bodies*, for Chrissake—what's a matter with ya? Their bodies take in nutrition and all, right through the goddam seaweed and crap that's in the ice. They got their *pores* open the whole time. That's their *nature*, for Chrissake. See what I mean?” He turned way the hell around again to look at me.

“Oh,” I said. I let it drop. I was afraid he was going to crack the damn taxi up or something. Besides, he was such a touchy guy, it wasn't any pleasure discussing anything with him. “Would you care to stop off and have a drink with me somewhere?” I said.

He didn't answer me, though. I guess he was still thinking. I asked him again, though. He was a pretty good guy. Quite amusing and all.

“I ain't got no time for no liquor, bud,” he said. “How the hell old are you, anyways? Why ain'tcha home in bed?”

“I'm not tired.”

When I got out in front of Ernie's and paid the fare, old Horwitz brought up the fish again. He certainly had it on his mind. “Listen,” he said. “If you was a fish, Mother Nature'd take care of *you*, wouldn't she? Right? You don't think them fish just *die* when it gets to be winter, do ya?”

“No, but—”

“You're goddam right they don't,” Horwitz said, and drove off like a bat out of hell. He was about the touchiest guy I ever met. Everything you said made him sore.

Even though it was so late, old Ernie's was jam-packed. Mostly with prep school jerks and college jerks. Almost every damn school in the world gets out earlier for Christmas vacation than the schools I go to. You could hardly check your coat, it was so crowded. It was pretty quiet, though, because Ernie was playing the piano. It was supposed to be something *holy*, for

God's sake, when he sat down at the piano. Nobody's *that* good. About three couples, besides me, were waiting for tables, and they were all shoving and standing on tiptoes to get a look at old Ernie while he played. He had a big damn mirror in front of the piano, with this big spotlight on him, so that everybody could watch his face while he played. You couldn't see his *fingers* while he played—just his big old face. Big deal. I'm not too sure what the name of the song was that he was playing when I came in, but whatever it was, he was really stinking it up. He was putting all these dumb, show-offy ripples in the high notes, and a lot of other very tricky stuff that gives me a pain in the ass. You should've heard the crowd, though, when he was finished. You would've puked. They went mad. They were exactly the same morons that laugh like hyenas in the movies at stuff that isn't funny. I swear to God, if I were a piano player or an actor or something and all those dopes thought I was terrific, I'd hate it. I wouldn't even want them to *clap* for me. People always clap for the wrong things. If I were a piano player, I'd play it in the goddam closet. Anyway, when he was finished, and everybody was clapping their heads off, old Ernie turned around on his stool and gave this very phony, *humble* bow. Like as if he was a helluva humble guy, besides being a terrific piano player. It was very phony—I mean him being such a big snob and all. In a funny way, though, I felt sort of sorry for him when he was finished. I don't even think he *knows* any more when he's playing right or not. It isn't all his fault. I partly blame all those dopes that clap their heads off—they'd foul up *anybody*, if you gave them a chance. Anyway, it made me feel depressed and lousy again, and I damn near got my coat back and went back to the hotel, but it was too early and I didn't feel much like being all alone.

They finally got me this stinking table, right up against a wall and behind a goddam post, where you

couldn't see anything. It was one of those tiny little tables that if the people at the next table don't get up to let you by—and they never *do*, the bastards—you practically have to *climb* into your chair. I ordered a Scotch and soda, which is my favorite drink, next to frozen Daiquiris. If you were only around six years old, you could get liquor at Ernie's, the place was so dark and all, and besides, nobody cared how old you were. You could even be a dope fiend and nobody'd care.

I was surrounded by jerks. I'm not kidding. At this other tiny table, right to my left, practically on *top* of me, there was this funny-looking guy and this funny-looking girl. They were around my age, or maybe just a little older. It was funny. You could see they were being careful as hell not to drink up the minimum too fast. I listened to their conversation for a while, because I didn't have anything else to do. He was telling her about some pro football game he'd seen that afternoon. He gave her every single goddam play in the whole game—I'm not kidding. He was the most boring guy I ever listened to. And you could tell his date wasn't even interested in the goddam game, but she was even funnier-looking than *he* was, so I guess she *had* to listen. Real ugly girls have it tough. I feel so sorry for them sometimes. Sometimes I can't even look at them, especially if they're with some dopey guy that's telling them all about a goddam football game. On my *right*, the conversation was even worse, though. On my right there was this very Joe Yale-looking guy, in a gray flannel suit and one of those flitty-looking Tattersall vests. All those Ivy League bastards look alike. My father wants me to go to Yale, or maybe Princeton, but I swear, I wouldn't go to one of those Ivy League colleges, if I was *dying*, for God's sake. Anyway, this Joe Yale-looking guy had a terrific-looking girl with him. Boy, she was good-looking. But you should've heard the conversation they were having.

In the first place, they were both slightly crooked. What he was doing, he was giving her a feel under the table, and at the same time telling her all about some guy in his dorm that had eaten a whole bottle of aspirin and nearly committed suicide. His date kept saying to him, "How horrible . . . Don't, darling. Please, don't. Not here." Imagine giving somebody a feel and telling them about a guy committing suicide at the same time! They killed me.

I certainly began to feel like a prize horse's ass, though, sitting there all by myself. There wasn't anything to do except smoke and drink. What I did do, though, I told the waiter to ask old Ernie if he'd care to join me for a drink. I told him to tell him I was D.B.'s brother. I don't think he ever even gave him my message, though. Those bastards never give your message to anybody.

All of a sudden, this girl came up to me and said, "Holden Caulfield!" Her name was Lillian Simmons. My brother D.B. used to go around with her for a while. She had very big knockers.

"Hi," I said. I tried to get up, naturally, but it was some job getting up, in a place like that. She had some Navy officer with her that looked like he had a poker up his ass.

"How marvelous to see you!" old Lillian Simmons said. Strictly a phony. "How's your big brother?" That's all she really wanted to know.

"He's fine. He's in Hollywood."

"In Hollywood! How marvelous! What's he doing?"

"I don't know. Writing," I said. I didn't feel like discussing it. You could tell she thought it was a big deal, his being in Hollywood. Almost everybody does. Mostly people who've never read any of his stories. It drives me crazy, though.

"How exciting," old Lillian said. Then she introduced me to the Navy guy. His name was Commander Blop or something. He was one of those guys that

think they're being a pansy if they don't break around forty of your fingers when they shake hands with you. God, I hate that stuff. "Are you all alone, baby?" old Lillian asked me. She was blocking up the *whole goddam traffic* in the aisle. You could tell she liked to block up a lot of traffic. This waiter was waiting for her to move out of the way, but she didn't even notice him. It was funny. You could tell the waiter didn't like her much, you could tell even the Navy guy didn't like her much, even though he was dating her. And I didn't like her much. Nobody did. You had to feel sort of sorry for her, in a way. "Don't you have a date, baby?" she asked me. I was standing up now, and she didn't even tell me to sit down. She was the type that keeps you standing up for hours. "Isn't he handsome?" she said to the Navy guy. "Holden, you're getting handsomer by the minute." The Navy guy told her to come on. He told her they were blocking up the whole aisle. "Holden, come join us," old Lillian said. "Bring your drink."

"I was just leaving," I told her. "I have to meet somebody." You could tell she was just trying to get in good with me. So that I'd tell old D.B. about it.

"Well, you little so-and-so. All right for you. Tell your big brother I hate him, when you see him."

Then she left. The Navy guy and I told each other we were glad to've met each other. Which always kills me. I'm always saying "Glad to've met you" to somebody I'm not at *all* glad I met. If you want to stay alive, you have to say that stuff, though.

After I'd told her I had to meet somebody, I didn't have any goddam choice except to *leave*. I couldn't even stick around to hear old Ernie play something halfway decent. But I certainly wasn't going to sit down at a table with old Lillian Simmons and that Navy guy and be bored to death. So I left. It made me mad, though, when I was getting my coat. People are always ruining things for you.