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Opening extract from

The Catcher in the Rye

Written by

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I

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 *mold*ing 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 bleedy-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 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 *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 grippe 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 unhairy. '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-by 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 *e*ssay, 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 firecracker.

> 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 *writ*ten 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 stiffs. 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 a 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 *any*where. 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 *ev*erybody'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 terrifically bored or terrifically tired. He didn't want you to think he was *vis*iting you or anything. He wanted you to think he'd come in by mis*take*, 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 *any*way, 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 *sub*way, 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 you 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 ex*act*ly 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 hellya 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 *sen*tence 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 *any*thing. 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 *clunk*, 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 *at*titude 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 –'

'*Ack*ley! 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 instance, 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 height, 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.