

THE CATCHER IN THE RYE

J.D Salinger

'Do you want to get a table inside and have a drink or something?' I said to her finally.

'That's the most marvelous idea you've had all day,' she said. She was killing herself. It was brutal. I really felt sorry for her.

We took off our goddam skates and went inside this bar where you can get drinks and watch the skaters in just your stocking feet. As soon as we sat down, old Sally took off her gloves, and I gave her a cigarette. She wasn't looking too happy. The waiter came up, and I ordered a Coke for her – she didn't drink – and a Scotch and soda for myself, but the sonuvabitch wouldn't bring me one, so I had a Coke, too. Then I sort of started lighting matches. I do that quite a lot when I'm in a certain mood. I sort of let them burn down till I can't hold them any more, then I drop them in the ashtray. It's a nervous habit.

Then all of a sudden, out of a clear blue sky, old Sally said, 'Look. I have to know. Are you or aren't you coming over to help me trim the tree Christmas Eve? I have to know.' She was still being snotty on account of her ankles when she was skating.

'I wrote you I would. You've asked me that about twenty times. Sure, I am.'

'I mean I have to know,' she said. She started looking all around the goddam room.

All of a sudden I quit lighting matches, and sort of leaned nearer to her over the table. I had quite a few topics on my mind. 'Hey, Sally,' I said.

'What?' she said. She was looking at some girl on the other side of the room.

'Did you ever get fed up?' I said. 'I mean did you ever get scared that everything was going to go lousy unless you did something? I mean do you like school, and all that stuff?'

'It's a terrific bore.'

'I mean do you hate it? I know it's a terrific bore, but do you hate it, is what I mean.'

'Well, I don't exactly hate it. You always have to –'

'Well, I hate it. Boy, do I hate it,' I said. 'But it isn't just that. It's everything. I hate living in New York and all. Taxicabs, and Madison Avenue buses, with the drivers and all always yelling at you to get out at the rear door, and being introduced to phony guys that call the Lunts angels, and going up and down in elevators when you just want to go outside, and guys fitting your pants all the time at Brooks, and people always –'

'Don't shout, please,' old Sally said. Which was very funny, because I wasn't even shouting.

'Take cars,' I said. I said it in this very quiet voice. 'Take most people, they're crazy about cars. They worry if they get a little scratch on them, and they're always talking about how many miles they get to a gallon, and if they get a brand-new car already they start thinking about trading it in for one that's even newer. I don't even like old cars. I mean they don't even interest me. I'd rather have a goddam horse. A horse is at least human, for God's sake. A horse you can at least –'

'I don't know what you're even talking about,' old Sally said. 'You jump from one –'

'You know something?' I said. 'You're probably the only reason I'm in New York right now, or anywhere. If you weren't around, I'd probably be someplace way the hell off. In the woods or some

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goddam place. You're the only reason I'm around, practically.'

'You're sweet,' she said. But you could tell she wanted me to change the damn subject.