

Catcher in the Rye

If you really want to know, I reckon old J.D. was a big old phony. I mean, he wrote this one great book and all, and it really cracks me up too by the way, but I still reckon he's a big old phony. I mean, all that stuff about hating the movies so much and the guy's a goddam movie critic, for Chrissake. And hating actors, too, and he wrote plays. Give me a break. I see his game, though. That's just his way of trying to *disguise* himself, like we didn't all know that old J.D. *was* Holden Caulfield. Talk about the great autobiographical first novel. That's it, right there. Pretty thin disguise if you ask me. All that stuff he gives Holden to say 'bout books and all. Just happens to be old J.D.'s favourite authors too. Believe me, I know about this stuff. Big coincidence, I don't think. Still, like I say, *Catcher* cracks me up. You'd love it, you really would.

It's not like you want to give old Holden a big wet kiss and have his *babies* or anything pervy like that. But the whole thing's kinda sentimental. For instance, all that stuff with his kid sister, Phoebe, and the red hunting hat and the carrousel and all. If they made a movie of it, it would probably make you puke. But right there on the page, it kills you, honest to God it does. Give me books over movies every time. You can do stuff with red hunting hats in stories. You can do stuff with baseball mitts. I *hate* the goddam movies. Caulfield's so darn *sensitive* he couldn't be in a movie. He'd be a creep. You'd hate him. Hey, the guy hides his goddam *suitcases* so his room mate won't feel bad. How creepy is that? But you can do that in stories, that's the point. It works.

And don't go thinking that just because Caulfield ends up in the loony bin that he's a crazy guy. Actually that ending's pretty corny if you want my honest opinion. Old J.D. specialised in corny endings. Try *Bananafish* or *To Esme* for instance. Corny and downbeat. But then you try being at the D-day landings and the Battle of the Bulge and see how goddam jolly your stories are afterwards. You know what really makes me mad? When people think Caulfield's a crazy bastard. He's not. The guy's normal, that's his problem. OK, maybe not normal normal. Perhaps more like overwrought normal. You know who I think are the crazy people? People who aren't crazy at all, not even a tiny little bit. They disturb me. So goddam *well-adjusted*, it can't be right. I hate those people, I really do.

Hey, the guy's just flunked his exams - nothing abnormal about that. And he's got chucked out of school for the fourth time. He's going to be depressed. He's 16. He's going to do stupid things. So far, so normal. He's just a bit stupider than usual, that's all. And a lot funnier. And a lot more talkative. The guy doesn't know when to shut up, for Chrissake. Ok, so its a little nutty to ask cab drivers where ducks go in the winter. But it's kind of endearing nutty, not worrying nutty.

That pervy guy, Mr. Antolini, gets it spot on. He knows Caulfield's problem isn't inside his head. He knows the problem is outside. Holden really *is* surrounded by phonies. His problem is that he understands people all too well. He knows what gives people a bang. But he's too darn aware of their foibles. It's like every time someone does something phony a big neon sign flashes in his head. We all do that phony stuff, you know we do. Holden really is surrounded by phonies, because we're all phonies.