

**THE CATCHER
IN THE RYE**

j . d . s a l i n g e r

illustrated by

e m m a h a r r i s

THE CATCHER IN THE RYE

We open the scene in New York, 1946. Holden Caulfield, young protagonist, is angsty teen at its finest. J.D. Salinger's book elegantly rambles its way through many deep and meaningful topics, namely: sex, sex, gender in relationships, depression, identity, and sex. Today's digital generation of passive-aggressive sociopolitical rants and isolating computer screens will find this book especially applicable. Put your Orwell down, young anarchists. It's time for some good old-fashioned self reflection...

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 CHILHOOD
WAS LIKE

AND HOW
MY PARENTS WERE
OCCUPIED AND ALL
BEFORE THEY
HAD ME.

THEY'RE NICE AND
ALL, BUT THEY'RE ALSO
TOUCHY AS HELL.

BESIDES, I'M NOT GOING TO
TELL YOU MY WHOLE GODDAMN
AUTOBIOGRAPHY OR ANYTHING.



The awkward tension between Holden and nearly every other male character in the book leads us to one of two conclusions: 1. Holden Caulfield is a closeted gay prep school boy, deeply uncomfortable with his own sexuality and trapped in a society that will never accept him, who goes to great lengths to mock "flits" (outdated offensive slang referring to male homosexuals) 2. Holden Caulfield is merely, as he describes himself, "yellow" (slang: cowardly), and like many other self-conscious adolescents, Holden lacks typical alpha male traits and compares himself to other boys his age. The seemingly intentional ambiguity of the book does little to help us reach a definite conclusion. A quick scan of the internet doesn't help much either.

Pencey Prep, Holden's all-boys boarding school in Agerstown, Pennsylvania...



The previous summer...



I WOULDN'T EXACTLY DESCRIBE HER AS STRICTLY BEAUTIFUL. SHE KNOCKED ME OUT, THOUGH.



I REMEMBER THIS ONE AFTERNOON, IT WAS THE ONLY TIME JANE AND I EVEN GOT CLOSE TO NECKING, EVEN. WE WERE PLAYING CHECKERS.

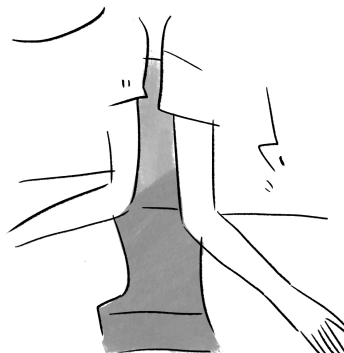
THEN THIS BOOZE HOUND HER MOTHER WAS MARRIED TO CAME AND ASKED JANE IF THERE WERE ANY CIGARETTES IN THE HOUSE.



OLD JANE WOULDN'T ANSWER HIM.



ALL OF A SUDDEN, THIS TEAR PLOPPED DOWN ON THE CHECKERBOARD.

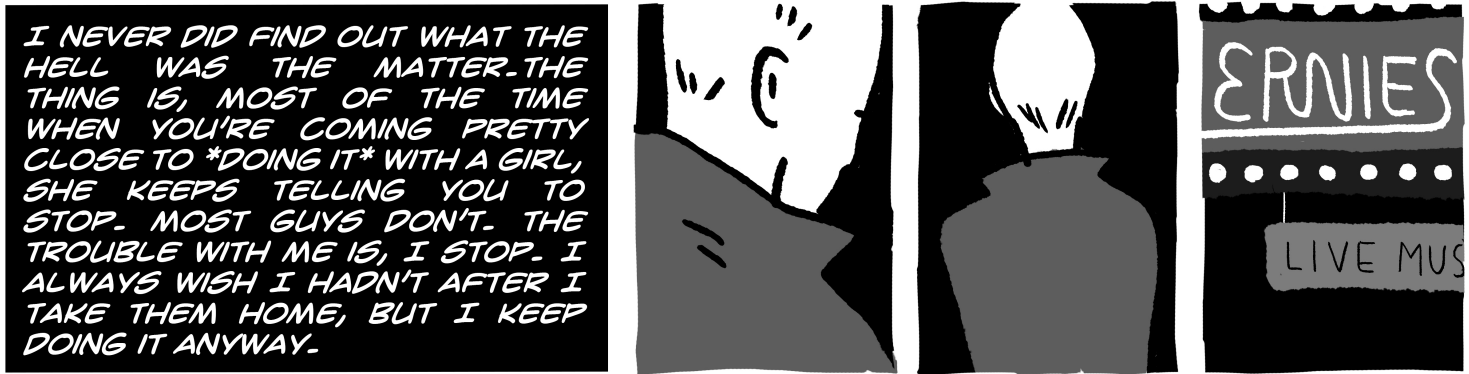


SO WHAT I DID WAS, I WENT OVER AND MADE HER MOVE SO THAT I COULD SIT DOWN NEXT TO HER.

THEN SHE REALLY STARTED TO CRY. THE NEXT THING I KNEW, I WAS KISSING HER ALL OVER-



-HER WHOLE FACE EXCEPT HER MOUTH AND ALL.



It would appear that the past six decades of women's suffrage have done little to change the state of relations between males and females in the dating world. Holden's honest description of his romantic encounters is, unfortunately, quite similar to that of today's. Even in America's "golden age," sexism, abuse, rape, and unhealthy male dominance ran rampant and more concerningly, undetected. The question is, is Holden's moral compass stronger than that of his male peers? Or more accurately, does Holden's tendency to accept "no" as "no" reveal a respect for women, or merely his own self-proclaimed cowardice?

...

Yet another pressing question - why the hell does Holden say "phony" so much? In the interest of time it's quicker to name the characters that aren't described as such: Jane, Holden's deceased brother Allie, and Holden's little sister, Phoebe. Everyone else is phony, according to Holden. Perhaps this stems from Holden's unlikely individualistic streak. In today's world, you'd find him in the dark corners of the internet, probably on a subreddit about philosophy. But in the late 40's our dear boy has to resort to the next best thing: contempt for anyone and everything that he deems inauthentic or contrived. Whether or not his strong opinions are justified is still up for debate. In many cases, Holden displays hypocrisy. He is remarkable quick to form opinions of others, but fails to recognize the times he acts "phony."



Heading back to a hotel room...

I'M ALWAYS SAYING "GLAD TO'VE MET YOU" TO SOMEBODY I'M NOT AT ALL GLAD TO'VE MET.

IF YOU WANT TO STAY ALIVE, YOU HAVE TO SAY THAT STUFF, THOUGH.

Y'INNERESTED? FIVE BUCKS A THROW. FIFTEEN BUCKS THE WHOLE NIGHT -



IT WAS AGAINST MY PRINCIPALS AND ALL, BUT I WAS FEELING SO DEPRESSED I DIDN'T EVEN THINK. THAT'S THE WHOLE TROUBLE. WHEN YOU'RE FEELING VERY DEPRESSED, YOU CAN'T EVEN THINK.

OKAY.

JUST A THROW.



I'LL SEND A GIRL UP IN ABOUT FIFTEEN MINUTES.



ANYWAY, I KEPT WALKING AROUND THE ROOM, WAITING FOR THIS PROSTITUTE TO SHOW UP.

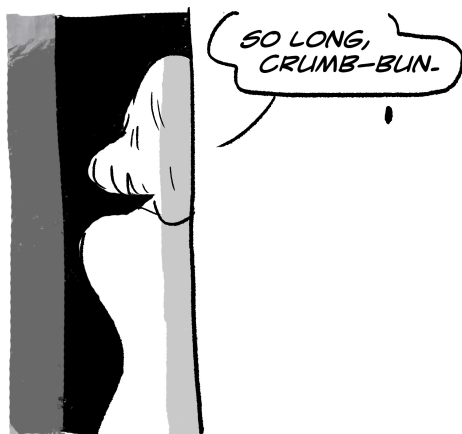


LET'S GO, HEY.

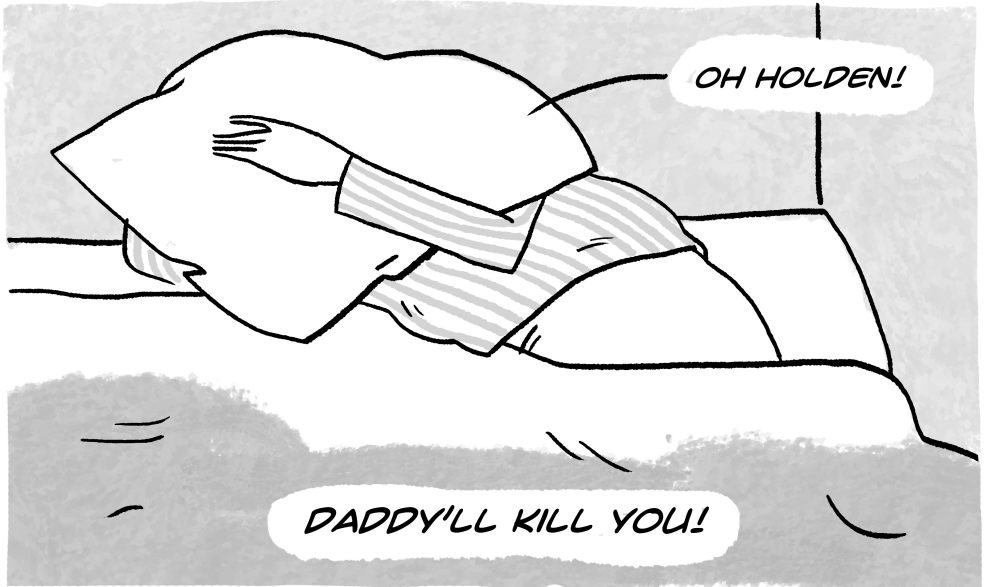
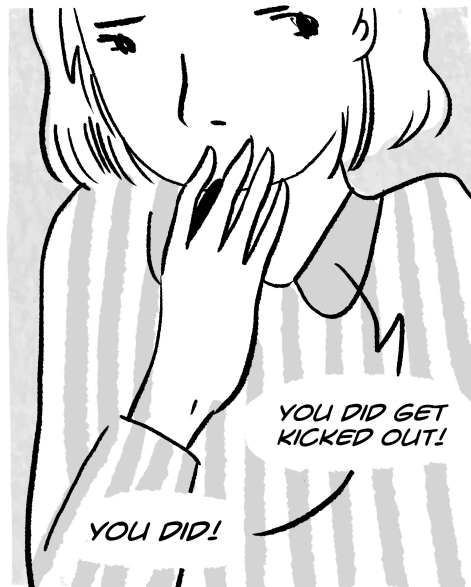
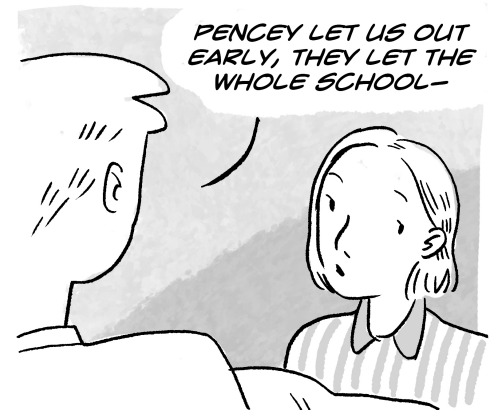
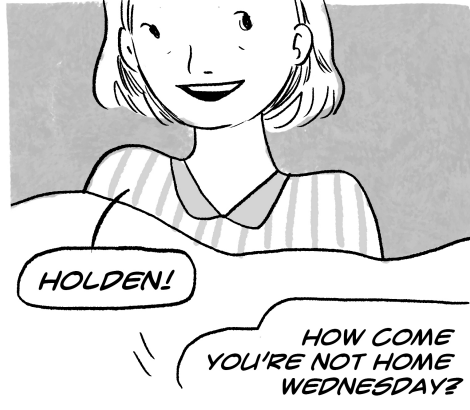
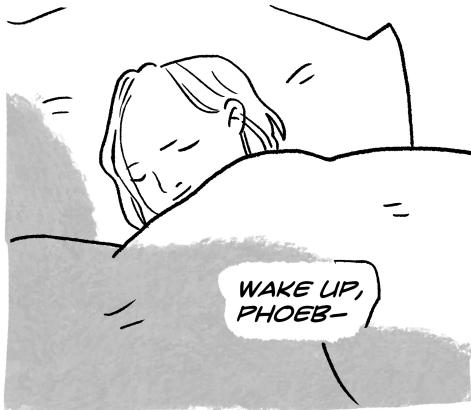


DON'T YOU FEEL LIKE TALKING FOR A WHILE?





But who is Holden Caulfield? At his very core what do we find? Perhaps he's merely a confused, hormonal boy, too blind to see all the ways that he is privileged in life. But maybe there's something more. Maybe once we peel away the layers of cynicism, idealism, awkwardness, and pretentiousness we'll find a boy who is deeply lonely. Who is guarded because he's never had anyone try to understand him. Perhaps Salinger's aim is that after 26 chapters of Holden's rambling stream of conscious thought we will understand ourselves better through his confusion. That his struggle between extremes will lead to our own comfortable acceptance of some place in the middle. That we will begin to see that people aren't always who they seem. And all this we'll learn from a depressed prep school boy from decades ago whose story never truly feels completed. But then again, maybe its uncomfortably floating lack of resolution will cause it to stay with us always, its abstract lessons a constant reminder of the people we hope to be.





ALRIGHT. NAME ONE THING YOU'D LIKE TO BE.

YOU KNOW WHAT I'D LIKE TO BE, IF I HAD MY GODDAMN CHOICE?

YOU KNOW THAT SONG - "IF A BODY CATCH A BODY COMING THROUGH THE RYE" ?

I KEEP PICTURING ALL THESE LITTLE KIDS PLAYING IN THIS BIG FIELD OF RYE.

AND I'M STANDING ON THE EDGE OF SOME CRAZY CLIFF.

I HAVE TO CATCH EVERYBODY IF THEY START TO GO OVER THE CLIFF.

THAT'S ALL I'D DO ALL DAY.

I'D JUST BE THE CATCHER IN THE RYE AND ALL

THAT'S THE ONLY THING I'D REALLY LIKE TO BE.

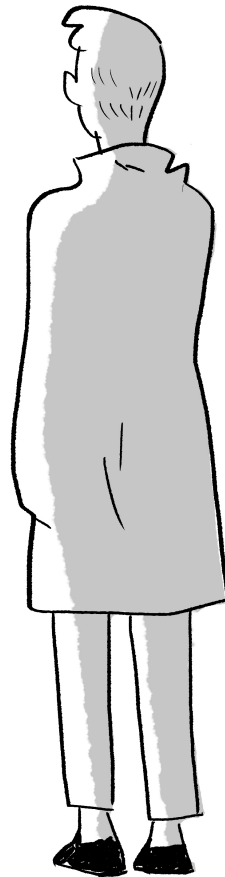


I KNOW IT'S CRAZY.

THAT'S ALL I'M GOING TO TELL ABOUT IT.
IF YOU WANT TO KNOW THE TRUTH, I DON'T
KNOW WHAT TO THINK ABOUT IT.

I'M SORRY I TOLD
SO MANY PEOPLE. DON'T EVER
TELL ANYBODY ANYTHING.

IF YOU DO, YOU
START MISSING
EVERYBODY.



THE END