

THE REINCARNATION
OF
J. D. SALINGER

JOHN I COBY

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J.D.

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'Why do you think you are here, Jerome?' he said.

'Call me J.D., doc, OK?' I said.

He was ugly as sin, Donneville, but you could tell he thought he was king shit, God's gift. His face looked like an old bomb-testing range, like the backside of the Moon. Houston had a problem. He was tall, maybe six-four, and lean, and he obviously thought he was some kind of cool. But he looked shady like a porn peddler.

'OK, Jerome, why are you here?'

Stupid turd. I am here because my mother sent me here. There were photos of women around his office, no family pictures. The stupid dickmaster flipped his lid at school, big time.

'It's J.D. I said.'

'Does that stand for anything, Jerome?'

He doesn't get it. I should be psychoanalysing *him*! I swear he's a dumb shit. What happened to your face, doc? Walk into a shredder?

'Juvenile delinquent.'

'I see.'

You don't see nothing, you big dick.

'I hear that you've been acting rebellious lately.'

You hear? He sat opposite, across this big, wide, shiny-brown desk, in a huge, green-leather throne. He picked up a pipe and began to mess with it. There was a big window looking across Macquarie Street and shelves of books. I noticed Freud. *He* was a tigger. Thought about doing it with his mother, I kid you not. I was sitting in a square chair on my side. The table wasn't big enough.

'Would you like to tell me what the problem is, Jerome?'

Right now, doc, you're the problem. Your stinking attitude is the problem. Your very existence is the problem. Freud is the problem. What are you doing in my life? Who gave you an invitation?

'I told you, it's J.D.'

'For juvenile delinquent,' he said sarcastically.

'How much are my parents paying you for this?' I asked him straight up. It shocked him a bit. He tried to act cool, but I saw it, like a bullet to his brain. He was sensitive about money.

'Jerome, we are not going to discuss my fee.'

Come on mister smartfuckingarse, with your stinking pipe.

'Is there anything you would like to talk about ... OK then ... J.D.?'

That's better. You aren't as messed up as you look. He started playing with his pipe, scratching the crap out of it and tapping it into a fancy ashtray. Tap, tap, tap. What a bullshit routine. I'm looking straight through you, Donneville, and you can't even tell. I see everything. I'm looking through you and you are looking at your pipe. You haven't looked at me since I arrived. Look at me you son of a bitch. Look at me! Forget it.

'How long have you been smoking, doc?' I asked. He kept looking at his pipe, not at me, and raised his eyebrows like, what the fuck? 'Has it been long? Because cancer, you know, doc. Ain't you seen the ads? You get gangrene in your lungs and drown in your own fluids ... doc.' I was laughing so hard inside it was killing me. I was screwing around with this dick and I wasn't even getting paid for it. You should be paying me, Donneville. 'So, what would you like to know, doc?' I figured that I better get some value for my parents' dough and all. But I won't let him in on my secret. No, not that. That's private. He ain't smart enough for that. He doesn't *deserve* to know. Stupid dick.

'Your mother said that they sent you home from school for being a troublemaker. They said that you talked back to your teachers and that you swore at one of them.'

Yeah, but I never hit any of them like they hit me. I was minding my own business walking across the quadrangle and I happened to pass through the end of a line of juniors, not thinking anything about it, when old McKerrow screams out, 'into my office, Davidson.' He went on and made a big deal about me walking through a line of kids. Honestly it made no difference to anybody. What really set him off in a fit of anger was when I said, 'they were only juniors, sir.' Well, you haven't ever seen anybody go off for no reason like old McKerrow then, I mean he exploded. He locked the door to his office from the inside and proceeded to scream at me. 'You people,' he screamed, 'you people, as soon as you get here you think that you own the place ... don't you?'

'No, sir,' I said.

My parents were from Serbia. Dad got our name changed from Davidovich, and don't you worry about it, we got the wog treatment, big time, every day. McKerrow was

the P.E. master and he was fit. He always wore tight little shorts and a T-shirt and acted real tough-manly-like all the time. Military sort of. His veins were sticking out of his neck he was screaming so much about you wogs this and you wogs that. I thought he was going to bust a vein. I was just standing there while he was screaming all out of control, building up pressure, when he laid a fist into me, as hard as he could, right into my stomach. The funny thing was that I didn't really feel it. I was a pretty active kid. Thinking about it later, I figured that I must have had pretty tough stomach muscles because you wouldn't believe the shocked look on McKerrow's face when I just stood there like nothing happened. He suddenly changed and became all friendly like, telling me that he hoped that I learnt my lesson and that we should act like men and 'cop our punishments like men, OK?' I said 'OK' and he let me out of his stupid office. After I read *Catcher*, I figured that he was some kind of sonofabitch, closet flit, not to mention a bloody racist. And he was one of my teachers that I was supposed to respect. Well, fuck that for a joke!

'They don't want to let you think for yourself, doc,' you dumb shit. 'They got some pretty screwed-up ideas and they expect us kids to just accept them,' like we're stupid or something.

'I see.'

He kept saying, I see, but I could tell that he could see fuck all, sweet fuck all. I didn't used to swear like this before I read *Salinger*. I didn't even used to think like this. I didn't used to think, period. But now I think I see everything. Everything.

'Is there a reason for your cap?' he said.

Well Christalmighty, doc, I must like it! I must like wearing it, hey? 'You don't recognise it then, doc?'

'Should I?' he said like a real smartarse, like he was making some headway with me with this condescending tone.

You should, you dick. Don't you read anything but tigger books like Freud? It's Holden's cap, moron. 'Not really. Want me to take it off?'

'It's so red,' he said, 'and you like to wear it backwards like that, with the earflaps down?'

I pulled the cap off my head. I wasn't going to see my parent's dough being wasted on my cap. I placed the cap on my lap and looked straight through him again. He was still playing with his pipe, faking it for everything he was worth. I said,

‘Was that about fifty bucks’ worth of cap talk, doc?’

I swear to God I saw him shudder, but he never looked at me. I was looking straight through him. I could see everything, and everything was fake. I knew then that he was a phoney, just like Freud. It hit me like everything hits me these days.

Old Ignis Donneville was a friend of one of my mother’s friends, old Loretta Burkowitz. I heard her refer to him as Iggy once when she was visiting my mother. Old Iggy, the stud, with his bullshit phoney pipe act. I wondered if he had Loretta’s picture lying around somewhere in his office.

‘I’ll ignore that remark,’ he said. You snotnosed brat, I reckon he thought. ‘So, you are having issues with your curriculum?’

Holy Christ almighty. If another person uses that word at me, I’m going to ...

‘They should ban that word, doc.’

‘Which one? Curriculum?’

No, you dumb, blind shit. ‘Er, no, the other one, doc.’

‘Ohh, OK.’

He started loading up his pipe with some tobacco from a fancy leather pouch. I just watched him. Shrinks can be scary people. They can put you away if they want to. You have to be careful. Shrinks can make me paranoid, but this one was OK. Old Iggy was nothing but a total phoney, only in it for the dough. I could see that straight away.

‘You’re not going to smoke that while I’m in here, are you, doc?’ He looked straight ahead at the wall. ‘Passive smoking, you know.’ He placed his pipe on the table. Then I said, ‘Got any papers?’

‘Papers?’ he asked, actually looking at me for the first time. ‘What for?’

‘Well, I thought I’d roll one and have a smoke with you.’ I was so messing with his head.

‘Forget it, J.D.’ I had him trained. ‘How about an example,’ he said. ‘Give me a point of disagreement with your teachers.’

There’s not enough dough in my father’s bank account, you crook, although there is a fair bit. He’s a jeweller up the top of Broadway where Grace Brother’s used to be. We don’t live far from there. It is right across from Sydney University where I go to swim in their pool and often eat at their cafeterias, which are always good and cheap. I have more uni friends than high school friends. High school bores me to death because all the

teachers take it for granted that we are all stupid. I have to admit it, they are 99 percent right, but I have news for them.

'Do you believe in God, doc?'

'What?'

'Do you believe in God?' Are you deaf as well as stupid?'

'Why?'

'Well, I just thought, doc, that I should know if the guy psychoanalysing me believed in God. Does that make me crazy?' God I was losing respect for this guy fast. He was rapidly descending down to my teacher level.

'No, that doesn't make you crazy. You're not here because anyone thinks you're crazy,' he said picking up his pipe and looking away.

'Was Freud an atheist as well?' I pressed him.

'Look, J.D., what bugs you about your teachers? Would you like to tell me?'

'Go ahead, light your pipe,' I said, 'I don't mind. I was just messing with you before.' I watched him light his pipe and glance at his clock. I was wearing him down so I thought that I would maybe just venture ankle-deep into my neurosis, because I knew that that was all that this dick could handle today.

'Evolution, doc.' That's all I said. That's all I wanted to say.

'Ahh, I see.'

Oh God, there he went again with his I see, like a broken record, fifty bucks a pop. I was a gold mine for this jerk. I should have kept my mouth shut. At least we had plenty of dough. It was always there. 'How much do you need, Jerry?' they say, my parents, and they give me whatever I ask for. When I visit the shop to see my dad, just for a chinwag, he likes a chinwag with me cause I'm his only child, and we're pals, when I'm there, he always opens a secret drawer and shows me all the diamonds. And I know that they're shady, but they keep us comfortable and my dad is way too smart for anything to go wrong. He's a real smart guy. He says that I'm a chip off the old block, but he doesn't like it when they kick me out of school. 'Don't draw attention to yourself,' he always tells me, 'be a blender.' In the house, in another secret drawer, there is a shiny, polished-chrome .44 Magnum and two 50-round boxes of jacketed, hollow-point cartridges. He has taught me how to use it out in the bush. Even though I held it out firmly, with both hands, and braced myself, it knocked me right off my feet onto my backside the first time I fired it. My dad laughed and laughed. He never keeps the gun loaded in the house, but he says

that the safest way to have it in the house is if I know exactly how to handle it. I have shot it enough times now that I'm pretty good at it. Dad buys a whole box of coconuts and puts them on a tree stump out in the bush. I swear to God you never seen a coconut explode like it does when it gets hit by one of them hollow-point slugs out of the .44 Magnum. Dad told me that I couldn't tell anyone about the gun because it was completely illegal, 'and untraceable,' he said. My dad knew all about guns and shooting people, but he didn't like to talk about *that* very much. I love my father, and my mum too, but she goes nuts with worry about me sometimes, for hardly no reason, but that doesn't mean that I love her any less. I had a sister, but she died.

'So, what about evolution bugs you, J.D.?' Donneville asked.

He was worming his way in. I had to watch it.

'How much longer have we got, doc?'

This dick'll cut session ten minutes early if he gets a chance. I'll bet my cap on it. He looked at the clock, turned toward me and said,

'I suppose that we have made good progress today, J.D. How do you feel about it?'

'Like you're a genius, doc,' you dumb tugger.

'OK, I'll see you in a week and you can tell me about evolution then, OK?'

'Can't wait, doc,' to get another day off from school.

Donneville wrote a brief letter to my mother and one to the dickmaster of my school, earning the cash he was paid, and I got to have a whole day off, except for the hour that I had to sit in the tugger's office and mess with his stupid head.

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Donneville worked in a pretty old building, up on the sixth floor, and the lift made you feel like a survivor when you finally made it down to the street. I reckoned that some other dumb jerk could freefall to his death in it and end up a crushed pile of bones at the bottom of the shaft.

I stepped out into Macquarie Street. It was only ten o'clock and it was Thursday. I had all day. The sun was out and it was mild. I took my cap out of my shoulder bag and pulled it over my head, backwards, earmuffs down. I felt like Holden, but I knew now, I knew it for sure, I was actually J.D. Salinger in another life.

A month ago, I was hanging with my uni friends at the uni and they were all going on about this book they all read. They were all charged and revving and everybody got something different out of it, but they were all redlining, valve bouncing. The book was

Catcher in the Rye. I am especially good friends with two girls studying social work. They're in their first year and I'm in year eleven in high school. They are both absolute foxes and they love me cause I'm kind of 'young and naïve', they say, 'like freshly-driven snow', Suzie says. It *never* snows in Sydney. The other one is Samantha. It was Sue who gave me her copy of Catcher in the Rye. I read it in two days. It blew my mind and then it opened my eyes. I saw everything, and I understood stuff, like *I* was J.D. Salinger. I kept it on me and took it everywhere and read it over and over. Suzie said I could keep it, but I eventually got my own copy and gave her her copy back. She was really happy that I did that and she kissed me on my cheek. I wanted to turn my head and get kissed on the mouth, but I chickened out. They live in the coolest student flat just across the road from the uni and I can visit them there anytime I want. Lots of other people hang out there and they talk about every kind of stuff none of my dumb school friends even think about. They talk about things I never heard of before, like eastern religions, like Buddhism and Krishna and reincarnation, and stuff like that. Sometimes they try to meditate and they also smoke lots of pot. They don't drink much, though. There's always music, really great music, like this old stuff, like Van Morrison and Santana, and J.J.Cale. God, I love it there.

I was standing outside Iggy's building not sure if I felt like turning left and walking down to the harbour or turning right and taking a hike up to Hyde Park. I could watch the chess game for a while, I thought. So, I tossed a coin. Heads left, tails right. Tails. I set off with my cap on backwards and my bag over my shoulder. There were cars and people everywhere. A cool breeze was blowing down the street from the park. Opposite the law courts I stopped at an outside café for a coffee and a toasted sandwich. A fat old guy came out, I think it was the owner, to hand me a menu. He was smiling real happy and said,

'This must be my lucky day. I get to serve a celebrity.'

I looked around. I couldn't see no celebrities.

'Where?' I said.

'Holden Caulfield,' he replied. 'I get to serve Holden Caulfield, the most famous young man in the world.'

'Ahh, the cap,' I said. Suddenly I felt real happy. 'Have you read it?' I asked.

'Yes, when I was a student. I now have three children and a beautiful wife. Got caught by the Catcher before I went over the cliff,' and then he did this thing with a wink and added, 'and all.'

He really laughed happy as he went away. I thought that he really got it, the meaning I mean, of the Catcher. He brought out my coffee and toasted sandwich and I could see how he looked around, all up and down Macquarie Street, and he said, 'You're the only one, kid.'

I wish my dumb teachers got it, and the stupid phonies that tell them what to teach and all. I get so frustrated, and angry, sometimes I just want to scream *fuck you out of my life* all up and down the halls. Sometimes I do it and it gets me kicked out and I end up in that dick-phoney-tugger Donneville's office. But I got him on a leash I'm pretty sure. I know mum wouldn't send me there under normal circumstances, if it weren't for that dickmaster at school. She's just trying to get me through, that's all, I know. I'm not angry with her, I love her. I know that I'm a crazy bastard, I know it.

The coffee was really hitting the spot. And the toasted sandwich was perfect. Really hit the spot too. I've been drinking coffee since I was little, I kid you not. Every Sunday mum makes Turkish coffee, 'the old way,' she says. The whole house smells of roasted coffee on Sunday mornings because she roasts the coffee beans herself in a pan on the stove. I swear you couldn't wake up to a nicer smell. Then she puts the roasted beans into a bronze hand grinder and gives it to dad to grind the coffee beans up. And the three of us sit around the table in the kitchen and listen to that grinder and dad telling stories from work about some shady diamond or other. 2CH is always playing on the radio.

I wish my sister was alive. I really really miss her. Samantha told me that she's my guardian angel now. I cried when she told me that, but now I believe it and it makes me feel better. I think I got a thing for Samantha. She's so beautiful. Just thinking about her makes me blow my lid and all.

I nearly finished the coffee. I was looking up Macquarie Street towards Hyde Park, thinking what I was going to do next, when I saw it. It was a long way away, way up the street, up near the park, but it stood out like it was the only coloured thing. All of a sudden, the whole world was black and white and all. I watched it disappear into the park. I pulled some dough out of my pocket and put it on the table under the saltshaker. Then I got up and walked pretty fast up the street chasing after the red cap.

I didn't see the cap again until I got into the park. I saw the person sitting by the Archibald Fountain. There were other people around, Japanese tourists taking pictures and suits with attaché cases walking like mindless robots. They were all grey. Just the cap and the rainbow in the fountain was colour. I walked over. The person had their

head turned away from me. They were wearing a tight pair of blue jeans and a really cool pair of red sneakers, and like a paisley shirt that looked like velvet with red and purple and brown patterns in it. It was unbuttoned in the front over an olive-green T-shirt. They had long, light-brown hair. Straight. They were very thin and quite tall, like me. And I just said, I kid you not,

‘Holden Caulfield?’

The person turned her head, she was a beautiful girl, saw my red cap on backwards and smiled, and said back to me, I do not lie,

‘Why, yes, Holden Caulfield.’

What were the odds? One month ago, I read *Catcher in the Rye* in two days, realized I was J.D. Salinger and started to fight back. I figured out what the bastards were up to and I started fighting back. Now they all think I’m rebellious and want me to see that dick Donneville, the tigger. Fuck. I went all over town looking for the cap until I found it in a disposal store up Parramatta Road. It’s like my uniform and all, but nobody knows that. It says that I’m fighting back, so *back off you shits, just back off!*

‘What’s your name?’ I asked her. She was really cute. I had my cap on backwards, but she had hers on frontwards. It was nearly the same as mine, same design with the earflaps and all, but hers was just a shade more on the orange side, but still super cool.

‘Phoebe,’ she said real cute like. I swear to God I was already falling in love, I kid you not.

‘Get out of here,’ I said laughing. ‘Like Holden’s little sister?’ I got a shot of panic all of a sudden, like I can’t be falling in love with my own little sister.

‘Yeah,’ she said and laughed looking me up and down. ‘You have materialized right out of my imagination, Holden Caulfield,’ she said.

‘It’s Jerry, but lately it’s J.D.’

‘Jerry? Like in Seinfeld?’

‘Jerry, like in Jerome ... Davidson ... J.D.’

‘Hello J.D.’ she said smiling and held her hand out to shake mine. We shook hands.

‘Hello, Phoebe.’

She was so foxalicious and fresh, and so Technicolor, and the rest of the world was all black and white and a million shades of grey. And like in the whole universe, right then, there was just one point of coloured light, shining through, and it was Phoebe and Holden’s red cap. The only other colour was the rainbow in the fountain.

'Don't you go to school?' I asked her.

'Sure, I go to school, but they told us to stay home today, and tomorrow. Some of the teachers are in big trouble. They have been feeling-up some of the younger girls and it got out and the police are there today. It's a big stink. Half our teachers are stupid lesbians, you know, and they don't even *try* to hide it. It makes me want to vomit just thinking about it. Yuk.'

I laughed, 'Yeah, chunder. What year are you in?' I wanted to know because she looked so young and so cute, but I could see now that she was pretty feisty, not gonna take no stupid fucking crap from no lezzo bitch, no way, thanks to the Catcher I reckon. Fucking bitches have no right.

'Year ten,' she said.

'I'm in eleven,' I said. 'You like school?'

'Not so much since I read *Catcher in the Rye*. That book woke me up. Made me see the crap they were trying to shove into my brain.'

Fucking bitches. Phoebe is such a nice girl and the fucking bitches just want to fuck her up. Fuck them to hell.

'Antolini,' I said.

'Yeah.' She knew exactly what I meant. 'So how come *you're* not at school today, J.D.?'

'Got kicked out. Swore at the teacher. Had an appointment with a shrink, but I'm free now.'

'Cool.'

God I was falling in love. Christ, she's *not* my little sister. Get off that.

'I was thinking maybe later going down the harbour and maybe getting on a ferry, but you know ... *You* got any plans?'

'Yes. I'm going to the art gallery. I want to look at Jackson Pollock.'

Hmm, an arty girl. I liked arty girls. Suzie and Samantha were arty girls and God knew how much I liked *them*.

'Blue Poles,' I said, because I knew that that was the only Jackson Pollock painting in the gallery.

'Yeah. You know Pollock?'

'I know Blue Poles. Saw it on a school excursion. All the kids laughed. Said it looked like vomit.'

'My dad has a big book about Jackson Pollock. It has all his paintings in it. It's one of my favourite books, other than *Catcher in the Rye*, which is my very favourite. My dad is a painter as well.'

'Can I come with you?' I said.

'I want you to come with me, Holden,' she said so nice, so cute, I flipped my lid and all.

'Thanks, Holden,' I said. She turned her cap backwards like mine. It made her look even cuter. '*Handle it, handle it,*' I was thinking to myself. Christ, now I wanted to put my arm around her. I started thinking about Blue Poles. That helped. She had been sitting on the side of the fountain. She rose to her feet. God, she was so slim and gorgeous, and tall, and her tight jeans were perfect, and her loose, purple-velvet shirt with the sleeves rolled up just past her wrists. She wore bangles like a hippy and when she stood there, she had a natural rhythm like a black girl. '*Blue Poles, Blue Poles. Cool shoes,*' I said. They matched her cap. She put her hand into her ethnic shoulder bag and pulled out a pair of aviator-style, reflector sunglasses and put them on. *God*, now she looked like a goddamned movie star. '*Blue Poles, Blue Poles.*' I got *my* shades out, John Lennon style with purple lenses. Mum and dad let me buy them. I wanted to look cooler amongst my uni friends. The freshly-driven snow needed some attitude I figured.

We set off and walked towards St. Mary's Cathedral. The way to the art gallery took us right past it. I couldn't help myself and I said, 'Those bullshit priests are in a lot of trouble lately.' I looked at her. She had a smile on her face. 'Are you catholic or anything?' I asked her. I didn't want to offend her.

'My mum and dad are into Krishna, but in a very private way. Nobody really knows. They're very cool about it.'

'I didn't want to offend you if you were catholic.'

'I'm not offended,' she said smiling at me.

'Yeah, well, them catholics are pretty messed up raping little boys.' I wanted to say fucked up but I was really trying not to swear in front of her because I really liked her and I just didn't think that she deserved to be exposed to my totally over-the-top foul language. 'It's all over the news and happening all over the world.'

'It has been happening for centuries,' she said. She seemed to know all about it. Then she surprised me when she said, 'I wonder if old Salinger knew something about it

and wrote *Catcher in the Rye* to sort of warn the kids about the dirty flits. Know what I mean?’

She looked at me, but all I could see were two of my John Lennon faces with Holden Caulfield’s caps around them in her reflectors. *The fuckers*, is all I could think, *the dirty fuckers*. ‘I know *exactly* what you mean,’ I said.

‘I think Salinger was a really good person,’ she said.

‘A magician,’ I said. Then I thought about the dirty fucker priests. The bullshit dicks hiding behind their dresses and big churches, all fucking holier than everybody while secretly raping the little boys, dragging them through the rye and shoving them over the cliff. *FUCK!* If there’s a hell it has to be full to the brim with the kid-fucker priests. That’s the *best* reason that I can think of for staying good and out of hell and all.

‘Let’s walk a little faster,’ she said as we walked past the front of St. Mary’s Cathedral. She gave it a dirty look and said, ‘It’s the Church of Antolini.’ And then she said, ‘It’s hard for me to tell *who* they actually worship in there, God or the devil.’

I knew exactly what she meant.

‘Flits,’ I said. ‘*Kid fuckers*,’ I thought.

‘Phonies,’ she agreed as she grabbed my hand and took off, pulling me with her. Holden was no jerk cause she’s read *Catcher in the Rye*. Shame all those raped little kids never got a chance to. We slowed up about fifty yards down the road. Phoebe glowed in intense colour. Her red cap was the brightest. Everything else, I mean everything, was a million shades of fucking grey. She kept holding onto my hand. My brain went spinning. I was flipping my lid I kid you not.

We walked to the gallery and went inside.

‘It’s a window into his mind,’ she said as we sat in front of Blue Poles.

‘It looks like he threw it into a blender,’ I said.

A bunch of school kids on an excursion walked past, all in a line. All you could hear was ‘gross’ and ‘yuk’ and ‘vomit’ and stuff. We both couldn’t stop laughing. Kids are so honest.

‘He was a bad alcoholic,’ she said. ‘It’s what my dad told me.’

It was taking my mind off wanting to put my arm around her.

‘Let’s deconstruct it,’ she suggested.

‘Deconstruct it?’ I said. ‘How do you deconstruct a painting?’

'Easy,' she said cool as can be. Even her voice had rhythm. God I was falling in love. I love you, Phoebe, I swear I do.

'How?'

'We figure out the last colour he splashed on it and then we mentally take it away. It's the colour with no other colours over it.'

Suddenly Blue Poles was all colours, but everything else was grey, except for Holden of course.

'OK.'

'Then we try to figure out why he chose that colour and why he chose to splash it where he did. That way we can begin to understand him better.'

This girl was smarter than I gave her credit for. She was becoming more foxalicious by the second. I was going to totally flip my lid in a minute if I wasn't careful, I swear to God I was.

'OK, which colour?'

'This isn't easy,' she said.

We were sitting on an upholstered bench seat without any back on it about twelve feet from the picture.

'I think it's making me dizzy,' I said. 'It's making me feel like I am looking into madness.'

'To me it looks like the birth of chaos,' she said all studious like. 'Not post-destructon, or pre-destruction, but right at the moment of destruction, right at the moment of total breakdown into insanity. See, the poles are all getting blown out and everything, all the order is in the moment of exploding into complete mishmash.'

'To me it looks like somebody's brains got splattered all over the canvas.'

'Gross me out,' she said. Then she said, 'You know, I almost feel like I was there when he painted it, sitting in front of it like this.'

'Oh yeah?' I said.

'See if you can tell which colour was put on last,' she said.

I had a bit of a look. 'Is it the poles?' I said.

'Close, I think. But see there, in a couple of places, the cream ...' God I wanted to put my arm around her. I stopped looking at the stupid painting and started looking at her face. Now that *was* a work of art, I kid you not. I was so in love it was hurting. 'Are you looking?' she said.

‘Sure, the cream,’ I said. Pollock was losing me, fast. I was becoming immune to Blue Poles. It wasn’t working like before because all I could think about now was putting my arm around her. Suddenly it hit me like a lightning bolt. ‘What do you reckon, Holden,’ I said, ‘if we took away the alcohol?’

She looked away from the picture and glanced at me around the red earflap of her cap and smiled. ‘Holden ...’ she said.

‘Well?’

‘Holden ... Pollock was *not* a phoney, come on.’

‘Look at the picture and take away the booze,’ I repeated. She was smiling the cutest smile. She looked so smart, and sharp, and Holden’s cap just set her off.

‘OK, I know what you want me to say. I’m not sure that I want to say it, because it might be true, but OK, take away the alcohol,’ she looked at the picture again, took her time, even tilted her cute head sideways, then finally said, ‘and all I see is a blank canvas.’

‘Aha,’ I said, ‘so it’s a phoney.’

‘Could be, Holden.’

You know, I could have spewed my usual diarrhoea of swearing about the phoney picture and the phoney artist, but I didn’t seeing as he never fooled the kids. He was a phoney up front, everybody knew it and all, and they all accepted it. A phoney hero, in a phoney world, full of phoney people. So, no problem, no abuse, cause the kids were wise to Pollock. You drink too much and you vomit. And the vomit is there for all to see. Walking away from the picture I kept thinking about it.

‘You know, Phoebe,’ I said as we stepped out of the gallery, ‘I’m thinking that Pollock may not be as big a phoney as I first thought.’

‘You know,’ she said, ‘phoney or not, I still like the way Blue Poles entertains its space.’

Like some drunk’s vomit entertains the footpath, I thought, but I wasn’t going to say anything because I was in love.

3

It was around about lunchtime. We were standing on the front steps of the gallery. I had no plans and I was hoping that she’d want to keep hanging out if you know what I mean.

‘Where do you live?’ I asked trying to not sound too nosy. She really looked amazing in the sun. ‘I live not far from Sydney Uni,’ I said.

'I'm in Rose Bay,' she said, 'just over the road from the tennis courts and up a side street a little. It's an easy bus ride into town from my place.'

I haven't got much experience with girls you know. Like I've never had a proper girlfriend or anything. I get so nervous and I always chicken out and never say anything. Suzie and Samantha are my favourite girls. I know that I'm not old enough to be their boyfriend or anything but they sure act like they love me cause they're always kissing me and hugging me. And they never wear bras and I can mostly see everything through their T-shirts. Samantha sometimes wears this loose top and when she leans forward, I can see right down it. I can see everything and she doesn't mind. I swear to God it blows my lid every time. I get embarrassed cause, you know, downstairs. Once, when there were just the three of us there, Suzy walked out of the shower clean naked, I swear to God I could see everything. She stopped and looked at me and laughed. I must have had my mouth open and my eyeballs must have been hanging out cause she said, 'what are *you* looking at?' but she didn't try to hide herself, she just went on and found some clothes and got dressed. I think they think of me like as their little brother or something, but I'm just flipping my lid all the time when they start getting all showy and stuff, know what I mean? Not that I know *that* much about sex and fucking and all. I've never done it. Never even come close. That's not saying that I don't know anything about it, I do, because my mum and dad told me all about it. They sat me down on my eleventh birthday and told me all about sex. My mum said that most people call it 'a rude word'. Then she described it to me and I couldn't believe what she was telling me. 'That little doodle there, Jerry, is for more than just piddling,' she said, 'and it does strange things.' And she told me all about vaginas and how girls get pregnant and how everybody that's ever lived got made that way. I couldn't believe what she was telling me. My dad just kept laughing and saying, 'listen to your mother, Jerry.' And then she told me about tugging and how I'd probably become a tigger just like every other boy that's ever lived, and she said that it was all normal and OK and to not worry about it too much. I didn't have a clue what she was talking about then, but I do now. My dad got me worried because he said that mother was mostly right about the tugging, then he warned me, he said, 'boys that do it too much end up going blind and sometimes even completely stupid,' and that I should keep it to a minimum. 'Save it for the girls,' he said. I remember how much they both laughed as they told me that last part. I hope that visiting Suzy and

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