



SLIGHT
REBELLION OFF
MADISON

J. D. SALINGER

Other stories:

The Young Folks *1940*
Go See Eddie *1940*
The Hang of It *1941*
The Heart of a Broken Story *1941*
The Long Debut of Lois Taggett *1941*
Personal Notes on an Infantryman *1942*
The Varioni Brothers *1943*
Both Parties Concerned (Wake Me When it Thunders) *1944*
Soft Boiled Sergeant (Death of a Dogface) *1944*
Last Day of the Last Furlough *1944*
Once a Week Won't Kill You *1944*
A Boy in France *1945*
Elaine *1945*
This Sandwich Has No Mayonnaise *1945*
The Stranger *1945*
I'm Crazy *1945*
~~Slight Rebellion Off Madison *1946*~~
A Young Girl in 1941 with No Waist at All *1947*
The Inverted Forest *1947*
A Girl I Knew (Wien, Wien) *1948*
Blue Melody *1948*
Hapworth 16, 1924 *1965*

J. D. Salinger

Slight Rebellion Off Madison

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On vacation from Pencey Preparatory School for Boys (“An Instructor for Every Ten Students”), Holden Morrisey Caulfield usually wore his ches-terfield and a hat with a cutting edge at the “V” in the crown. While riding in Fifth Avenue buses, girls who knew Holden often thought they saw him walking past Saks’ or Altman’s or Lord & Taylor’s, but it was usually somebody else.

This year, Holden’s Christmas vacation from Pencey Prep broke at the same time as Sally Hayes’ from the Mary A. Woodruff School for Girls (“Special Attention to Those Interested in Dramatics”). On vacation from Mary A. Woodruff, Sally usually went hatless and wore her new silverblu muskrat coat. While riding in Fifth Avenue, boys who knew Sally often thought they saw her walking past Saks’ or Altman’s or Lord & Taylor’s. It was usually somebody else.

As soon as Holden got into New York, he took a cab home, dropped his Gladstone in the foyer, kissed his mother, lumped his hat and coat into a convenient chair, and dialled Sally’s number.

“Hey!” he said into the mouthpiece. “Sally?”

“Yes. Who’s that?”

“Holden Caulfield. How are ya?”

“Holden! I’m fine! How are you?”

“Swell,” said Holden. “Listen. How are ya, anyway? I mean how’s school?”

“Fine,” said Sally. “I mean—you know.”

“Swell,” said Holden. “Well, listen. What are you doing tonight?”

Holden took her to the Wedgwood Room that night, and they both dressed, Sally wearing her new turquoise job. They danced a lot. Holden’s style was long, slow side steps back and forth, as though he were dancing over an open manhole. They danced cheek to cheek, and when their faces got sticky from contact, neither of them minded. It was a long time between vacations.

They made a wonderful thing out of the taxi ride home. Twice, when the cab stopped short in traffic, Holden fell off the seat.

“I love you,” he swore to Sally, removing his mouth from hers.

“Oh, darling, I love you, too,” Sally said, and added, less passionately, “Promise me you’ll let your hair grow out. Crew cuts are corny.”

The next day was a Thursday and Holden took Sally to the matinee of “O Mistress Mine,” which neither of them had seen. During the first intermission, they smoked in the lobby and vehemently agreed with each other that the Lunts were marvellous. George Harrison, of Andover, also was smoking in the lobby and he recognized Sally, as she hoped he would. They had been introduced once at a party and had never seen each other since. Now, in the lobby of the Empire, they greeted each other with the gusto of two who might frequently have taken baths together as small children. Sally asked George if he didn’t think the show was marvellous. George gave himself some room for his reply, bearing down on the foot of the woman behind him. He said that the play itself certainly was no masterpiece, but that the Lunts, of course, were absolute angels.

“Angels,” Holden thought. “Angels. For Chrissake. Angels.”

After the matinee, Sally told Holden that she had a marvellous idea. “Let’s go ice skating at Radio City tonight.”

“All right,” Holden said. “Sure.”

“Do you mean it?” Sally said. “Don’t just say it unless you mean it. I mean I don’t give a darn, one way or the other.”

“No,” said Holden. “Let’s go. It might be fun.”

Sally and Holden were both terrible ice skaters. Sally’s ankles had a painful, unbecoming way of collapsing towards each other and Holden’s weren’t much better. That night there were at least a hundred people who had nothing better to do than watch the skaters.

“Let’s get a table and have a drink,” Holden suggested suddenly.

“That’s the most marvellous idea I’ve heard all day,” Sally said.

They removed their skates and sat down at a table in the warm inside lounge. Sally took off her red woollen mittens. Holden began to light matches. He let them burn down until he couldn’t hold them, then he dropped what was left into an ashtray.

“Look,” Sally said, “I have to know—are you or aren’t you going to help me trim the tree Christmas Eve?”

“Sure,” said Holden, without enthusiasm.

“I mean I have to know,” Sally said.

Holden suddenly stopped lighting matches. He leaned forward over the table. “Sally, did you ever get fed up? I mean did you ever get scared

that everything was gonna go lousy unless you did something?"

"Sure," said Sally.

"Do you like school?" Holden inquired.

"It's a terrific bore."

"Do you hate it, I mean?"

"Well, I don't hate it."

"Well, I hate it," said Holden. "Boy, do I hate it! But it isn't just that. It's everything. I hate living in New York. I hate Fifth Avenue buses and Madison Avenue buses and getting out at the center doors. I hate the Seventy-second Street movie, with those fake clouds on the ceiling, and being introduced to guys like George Harrison, and going down in elevators when you wanna go out, and guys fitting your pants all the time at Brooks." His voice got more excited. "Stuff like that. Know what I mean? You know something? You're the only reason I came home this vacation."

"You're sweet," said Sally, wishing he'd change the subject.

"Boy, I hate school! You oughta go to a boys' school sometime. All you do is study, and make believe you give a damn if the football team wins, and talk about girls and clothes and liquor, and—"

"Now, listen," Sally interrupted. "Lots of boys get more out of school than that."

"I agree," said Holden. "But that's all I get out of it. See? That's what I mean. I don't get anything out of anything. I'm in bad shape. I'm in lousy shape. Look, Sally. How would you like to just beat it? Here's my idea. I'll borrow Fred Halsey's car and tomorrow morning we'll drive up to Massachusetts and Vermont and around there, see? It's beautiful. I mean it's wonderful up there, honest to God. We'll stay in these cabin camps and stuff like that till my money runs out. I have a hundred and twelve dollars with me. Then, when the money runs out, I'll get a job and we'll live somewhere with a brook and stuff. Know what I mean? Honest to God, Sally, we'll have a swell time. Then, later on, we'll get married or something. Wuddaya say? C'mon! Wuddaya say? C'mon! Let's do it, huh?"

"You can't just do something like that," Sally said.

"Why not?" Holden asked shrilly. "Why the hell not?"

"Because you can't," Sally said. "You just can't, that's all. Supposing your money ran out and you didn't get a job—then what?"

"I'd get a job. Don't worry about that. You don't have to worry about that part of it. What's the matter? Don't you wanna go with me?"

"It isn't that," Sally said. "It's not that at all. Holden, we'll have lots of time to do those things—all those things. After you go to college and we get married and all. There'll be oodles of marvellous places to go to."

"No, there wouldn't be," Holden said. "It'd be entirely different."

Sally looked at him, he had contradicted her so quietly.

"It wouldn't be the same at all. We'd have to go downstairs in elevators with suitcases and stuff. We'd have to call up everyone and tell 'em goodbye and send 'em postcards. And I'd have to work at my father's and ride in Madison Avenue buses and read newspapers. We'd have to go to the Seventy-second Street all the time and see newsreels. Newsreels! There's always a dumb horse race and some dame breaking a bottle over a ship. You don't see what I mean at all."

"Maybe I don't. Maybe you don't, either," Sally said.

Holden stood up, with his skates swung over one shoulder. "You give me a royal pain," he announced quite dispassionately.

A little after midnight, Holden and a fat, unattractive boy named Carl Luce sat at the Wadsworth Bar, drinking Scotch-and-sodas and eating potato chips. Carl was at Pencey Prep, too, and led his class.

"Hey, Carl," Holden said, "you're one of these intellectual guys. Tell me something. Supposing you were fed up. Supposing you were going stark, staring mad. Supposing you wanted to quit school and everything and get the hell out of New York. What would you do?"

"Drink up," Carl said. "The hell with that."

"No, I'm serious," Holden pleaded.

"You've always got a bug," Carl said, and got up and left.

Holden went on drinking. He drank up nine dollars' worth of Scotch-and-sodas and at 2 A.M. made his way from the bar into the little anteroom, where there was a telephone. He dialled three numbers before he got the proper one.

"Hullo!" Holden shouted into the phone.

"Who is this?" inquired a cold voice.

"This is me, Holden Caulfield. Can I speak to Sally, please?"

"Sally's asleep. This is Mrs. Hayes. Why are you calling up at this

hour, Holden?”

“Wanna talk Sally, Mis’ Hayes. Very ‘portant. Put her on.”

“Sally’s asleep, Holden. Call tomorrow. Good night.”

“Wake ‘er up. Wake ‘er up, huh? Wake ‘er up, Mis’ Hayes.”

“Holden,” Sally said, from the other end of the wire. “This is me.

What’s the idea?”

“Sally? Sally, that you?”

“Yes. You’re drunk.”

“Sally, I’ll come over Christmas Eve. Trim the tree for ya. Huh?

Wuddaya say? Huh?”

“Yes. Go to bed now. Where are you? Who’s with you?”

“I’ll trim the tree for ya. Huh? Wuddaya say? Huh?”

“Yes. Go to bed now. Where are you? Who’s with you?”

“I’ll trim the tree for ya. Huh? O.K.?”

“Yes! Good night!”

“G’night. G’night, Sally baby. Sally sweetheart, darling.”

Holden hung up and stood by the phone for nearly fifteen minutes.

Then he put another nickel in the slot and dialed the same number again.

“Hullo!” he yelled into the mouthpiece. “Speak to Sally, please.”

There was a sharp click as the phone was hung up, and Holden hung up, too. He stood swaying for a moment. Then he made his way into the men’s room and filled one of the washbowls with cold water. He immersed his head to the ears, after which he walked, dripping, to the radiator and sat down on it. He sat there counting the squares in the tile floor while the water dripped down his face and the back of his neck, soaking his shirt collar and necktie. Twenty minutes later the barroom piano player came in to comb his wavy hair.

“Hiya, boy!” Holden greeted him from the radiator. “I’m on the hot seat. They pulled the switch on me. I’m getting fried.”

The piano player smiled.

“Boy, you can play!” Holden said. “You really can play the piano. You oughta go on the radio. You know that? You’re damned good, boy.”

“You wanna towel, fella?” asked the piano player.

“Not me,” said Holden.

“Why don’t you go home, kid?”

Holden shook his head. “Not me,” he said. “Not me.”

The piano player shrugged and replaced the lady’s comb in his inside pocket. When he left the room, Holden stood up from the radiator and blinked several times to let the tears out of his eyes. Then he went to the checkroom. He put on his chesterfield without buttoning it and jammed his hat on the back of his soaking-wet head.

His teeth chattering violently, Holden stood on the corner and waited for a Madison Avenue bus. It was a long wait.