

I'm Crazy

IT WAS about eight o'clock at night, and dark, and raining, and freezing, and the wind was noisy the way it is in spooky movies on the night the old slob with the will gets murdered. I stood by the cannon on the top of Thomsen Hill, freezing to death, watching the big south windows of the gym-shining big and bright and dumb, like the windows of a gymnasium, and nothing else (but may be you never went to a boarding school.)

I just had on my reversible and no gloves. Somebody had swiped my camel's hair the week before, and my gloves were in the pocket. Boy, I saw cold. Only a crazy guy would've stood there. That's me, Crazy. No kidding, I have a screw loose. But I had to stand there to feel the goodbye to the youngness of the place, as though I were an old man. The whole school was down below in the gym for the basketball game with the Saxon Charter slobs, and I was standing there to feel the goodbye.

I stood there-boy, I was freezing to death-and I kept saying goodbye to myself, "Goodbye, Caulfield. Goodbye, you slob." I kept seeing myself throwing a football around, with Buhler and Jackson, just before it got dark on the September evenings, and I knew I'd never throw a football around ever again with the same guys at the same time. It was as though Buhler and Jackson and I had done something that had died and been buried, and only I knew about it, and no one was at the funeral but me. So I stood there, freezing.

The game with the Saxon Charter slobs was in the second half, and you could hear everybody yelling: deep and terrific on the Pentey side of the gym, and scrawny and faggoty on the Saxon Charter side, because the Saxon bunch never brought more than the team with them and a few substitutes and managers. You could tell all right when Schurz or Kinsella or Tuttle had sunk one on the slobs, because then the Pentey side of the gym went crazy. But I only half cared who was winning. I was freezing and I was only there anyway to feel the goodbye, to be at the funeral of me and Buhler and Jackson throwing a football around in the September evening-and finally on

one of the cheers I felt the goodbye like a real knife, I was strictly at the funeral.

So all of a sudden, after it happened, I started running down Thomsen Hill, with my suitcases banging the devil out of my legs. I ran all the way down to the Gate; then I stopped and goy my breath; then I ran across Route 202-it was icy and I fell and nearly broke my knee-and then I disappeared into Hessey Avenue. Disappeared. You disappeared every time you crossed a street that night. No kidding.

When I got to old Spencer's house-that's where I was going-I put down my bags on the porch, rang the bell hard and fast and put my hands on my ears-boy, they hurt. I started talking to the door. "C'mon, c'mon!" I said. "Open up. I'm freezing." Finally Mrs. Spencer came.

"Holden!" she said. "Come in, dear!" She was a nice woman. Her hot chocolate on Sundays was strictly lousy, but you never minded.

I got inside the house fast.

"Are you frozen to death? You must be *soaking* wet." Mrs. Spencer said. She wasn't the kind of woman that you could just be a little wet around: you were either real dry or soaking. But she didn't ask me what was doing out of bounds, so I figured old Spencer had told her what happened.

I put down my bags in the hall and took off my hat-boy, I could hardly work my fingers enough to grab my hat. I said, "How are you, Mrs. Spencer? How's Mr. Spencer's gripe? He over it okay?"

"Over it!" Mrs. Spencer said. "Let me take your coat, dear. Holden, he's behaving like a perfect I-don't-know-what. Go right in, dear. He's in his room."

Old Spencer had his own room next to the kitchen. He was about sixty years old, maybe even older, but he got a kick out of things in a half-shot way. If you thought about old Spencer you wondered what he was living for, everything about over for him and all. But if you thought about him that way, you were thinking about him the wrong way: you were thinking too much. If you thought about him just enough, not too much, you knew he was doing all right for himself. In a half-shot way he enjoyed almost everything all the time. I enjoy things terrifically, but just once in a

while. Sometimes it makes you think maybe old people get a better deal. But I wouldn't trade places. I wouldn't want to enjoy almost everything all the time if it had to be in just a half-shot way.

Old Spencer was sitting in the big easy chair in his bedroom, all wrapped up in that Navajo blanket he and Mrs. Spencer bought in Yellowstone Park about eighty years ago. They probably got a big bang out of buying it off the Indians.

"Come in. Caulfield!" old Spencer yelled at me. "Come in, boy!"

I went in.

THERE was an opened copy of the Atlantic Monthly face down on his lap, and pills all over the place and bottles and a hot-water bottle. I hate seeing a hot-water bottle, especially an old guy's. That isn't nice, but that's the way I feel... Old Spencer certainly looked beat out. He certainly didn't look like a guy who ever behaved like a perfect I-don't-know-what. Probably Mrs. Spencer just liked to think he was acting that way, as if she wanted to think maybe the old guy was still full of beans.

"I got your note, sir." I told him. "I would have come over anyway before I felt. How's your grippe?"

"If I felt any better, boy. I'd have to send for the doctor." old Spencer said. That really knocked him out. "Sit down, boy." he said, still laughing. "Why in the name of Jupiter aren't you down at the game?"

I sat down on the edge of the bed. It sort of looked like an old guy's bed. I said. "Well, I was at the game a while, sir. But I'm going home tonight instead of tomorrow. Dr. Thurmer said I could go tonight if I really wanted to. So I'm going"

"Well, you certainly picked a honey of a night." old Spencer said. He really thought that over. "Going home tonight, eh?" he said.

"Yes, sir," I said.

He said to me. "What did Dr. Thurmer say to you, boy?"

"Well, he was pretty nice in his way, sir," I said. "He said about life being a game. You know. How you should play it by the rules and all. Stuff

like that. He wished me a lot of luck. In the future and all. That kind of stuff."

I guess Thurmer really was pretty nice to me in his slobby way, so I told old Spencer a few other things Thurmer had said to me. About applying myself in life if I wanted to get ahead and all. I even made up some stuff, old Spencer was listening so hard and nodding all the while.

Then old Spencer asked me, "Have you communicated with your parents yet?"

"No, sir," I said. "I haven't communicated with them because I'll see them tonight."

Old Spencer nodded again. He asked me, "How will they take the news?"

"Well." I said, "they hate this kind of stuff. This is the third school I've been kicked out of Boy! No kidding." I told him.

Old Spencer didn't nod this time. I was bothering him, poor guy. He suddenly lifted the Atlantic Monthly off his lap, as though it had got too heavy for him, and chucked it towards the bed. He missed. I got up and picked it up and laid it on the bed. All of a sudden I wanted to get the heck out of there.

Old Spencer said, "What's the matter with you, boy? How many subjects did you carry this term?"

"Four," I said.

"And how many did you flunk?" he said.

"Four," I said.

Old Spencer started staring at the spot on the rug where the Atlantic Monthly had fallen when he tried to chuck it on the bed. He said, "I flunked you in history because you knew absolutely nothing. You were never once prepared, either for examinations or for daily recitations. Not once. I doubt if you opened your textbook once during the term; *did* you?"

I told him I'd glanced through it a couple of times, so's not to hurt his feelings. He thought history was really hot. It was all right with me if he thought I was a real dumb guy, but I didn't want him to think I'd given his book the freeze.

"Your exam paper is on my chiffonier over there." he said. "Bring it over here."

I went over and got it and handed it to him and sat down on the edge of the bed again.

Old Spencer handled my exam paper as though it were something catching that he had to handle for

the good of science or something, like Pasteur or one of those guys.

He said. "We studied the Egyptians from November 3d to December 4th. You chose to write about them for the essay question, from a selection of twenty-five topics. This is what you had to say:

"The Egyptians were an ancient race of people living in one of the northernmost section of North Africa, which is one of the largest continents in the Eastern Hemisphere as we all know. The Egyptians are also interesting to us today for numerous reasons. Also, you read about them frequently in the Bible. The Bible is full of amusing anecdotes about the old Pharaohs. They were all Egyptians as we all know."

Old Spencer looked up at me. "New paragraph," he said. "'What is most interesting about the Egyptians was their habits. The Egyptians had many interesting ways of doing things. Their religion was also very interesting. They buried their dead in tombs in a very interesting way. The dead Pharaohs had their faces wrapped up in specially treated cloths to prevent their features from rotting. Even to this day physicians don't know what that chemical formula was, thus all our faces rot when we are dead for a certain length of time.'" Old Spencer looked over the paper at me again. I stopped looking at him. If he was going to look up at me every time he hit the end of a paragraph, I wasn't going to look at him.

"There are many things about the Egyptians that help us in our everyday life." old Spencer said. Then he said: "The End." He put down my paper and chucked it towards the bed. He missed. The bed was only about two feet from his chair. I got up and put my exam paper on top of the Atlantic Monthly.

"Do you blame me for flunking you, boy?" old Spencer asked me. "What would you have done in my place?"

"The same thing," I said. "Down with the morons." But I wasn't giving it much thought at the minute. I was sort of wondering if the lagoon in Central Park would be frozen over when I got home, and if it was frozen over would everybody be ice skating when you looked out the window in

the morning, and where did the ducks go, what happened to the ducks when the lagoon was frozen over. But I couldn't have told all that to old Spencer.

He asked me, "How do you feel about all this, boy?"

"You mean my flunking out and all, sir?" I said.

"Yes," he said.

Well, I tried to give it some thought because he was a nice guy and because he kept missing the bed all the time when he chucked something at it.

"Well, I'm sorry I'm flunking out, for lots of reasons." I said. I knew I could never really get it over to him. Not about standing on Thomsen Hill and thinking about Buhler and Jackson and me. "Some of the reasons would be hard to explain right off, sir." I told him. "But tonight, for instance." I said. "Tonight I had to pack my bags and put my ski boots in them. The ski boots made me sorry I'm leaving. I could see my mother chasing around stores, asking the salesmen a million dumb questions. Then she bought me the wrong kind anyway. Boy, she's nice, tonight. No kidding. That's mostly why I'm sorry I'm flunking out. On account of my mother and the wrong ski boots." That's all I said. I had to quit.

OLD Spencer was nodding the whole time, as though he understood it all, but you couldn't tell whether he was nodding because he was going to understand anything I might tell him, or if he was only nodding because he was just a nice old guy with the gripping and a screwball on his hands.

"You'll miss the school, boy," he said to me.

He was a nice guy. No kidding. I tried to tell him, some more. I said, "Not exactly, sir. I'll miss some stuff. I'll miss going and coming to Pentey on the train; going back to his the dining car and ordering a chicken sandwich and a Coke, and reading five new magazines with all the pages slick and new. And I'll miss the Pentey stickers on my bag. Once a lady saw them and asked me if I knew Andrew Warbach. She was Warbach's mother, and you know Wadbach, sir. Strictly a louse. He's the kind of a guy, when you were a little kid, that twisted your wrist to get the marbles out of your hand. But his mother was all right.

She should have been in a nut house, like most mothers, but she loved Warbach. You could see in her nutty eyes that she thought he was hot stuff. So I spent nearly an hour on the train telling her what a hot shot Warbach is at school, how none of the guys ever make a move and all without going to Warbach first. It knocked Mrs. Warbach out. She nearly rolled in the aisle. She probably half knew he was a louse in her heart, but I changed her mind. I like mothers. They give me a terrific kick."

I stopped. Old Spencer wasn't following. Maybe he was a little bit, but not enough to make me want to get into it deep. Anyway, I wasn't saying much that I wanted to say. I never do. I'm crazy. No kidding.

Old Spencer said: "Do you plan to go to college, boy?"

"I have no plans, sir," I said. "I live from one day to the next." It sounded phony, but I was beginning to feel phony. I was sitting there on the edge of that bed too long. I got up suddenly.

"I guess I better go, sir," I said. "I have to catch a train. You've been swell. No kidding."

Well, old Spencer asked me if I didn't want a cup of hot chocolate before I felt, but I said no thanks. I shook hands with him. He was sweating pretty much. I told him I'd write him a letter sometime, that he shouldn't worry about me, that he oughtn't to let me get him down. I told him that I knew I was crazy. He asked me if I were sure I didn't want any hot chocolate, that it wouldn't take long.

"No," I said. "goodby, sir. Take it easy with your grippe now."

"Yes," he said, shaking hands with me again. "Goodby, boy."

He called something after me while I was leaving, but I couldn't hear him. I think it was good luck. I really felt sorry for him. I knew what he was thinking: how young I was, how I didn't know anything about the world and all, what happened to guys like me and all. I probably got him down for a while after I left, but I'll bet later on he talked me over with Mrs. Spencer and felt better, and he probably had Mrs. Spencer hand him his Atlantic Monthly before she left the room.

It was after one that night when I got home,

because I shot the bull for around a half hour with Pete, the elevator boy. He was telling me all about his brother-in-law. His brother-in-law is a cop, and he shot a guy; he didn't need to, but he did it to be a big shot, and now Pete's sister didn't like to be around Pete's brother-in-law anymore. It was tough. I didn't feel so sorry for Pete's sister, but I felt sorry for Pete's brother-in-law, the poor slob.

JEANNETTE, our colored maid, let me in. I lost my key somewhere. She was wearing one of those aluminum jobs in her hair, guaranteed to remove the kink.

"What choo doin' home, boy?" she said. "What choo doin' home, boy?" She says everything twice.

I was pretty sick and tired of people calling me "boy," so I just said, "Where are the folks?"

"They playin' bridge." She said. "They playin' bridge. What choo doin' home, boy?"

"I came home for the race." I said.

"What race?" the dope said.

"The human race. Ha, ha, ha." I said. I dropped my bags and coat in the hall and got away from her. I shoved my hat on the back of my head, feeling pretty good for a change, and walked down the hall and opened Phoebe and Viola's door. It was pretty dark, even with the door open, and I nearly broke my neck getting over to Phoebe's bed.

I sat down on her bed. She was asleep, all right.

"Phoebe," I said. "Hey. Phoebe!"

She walked up pretty easily.

"Holden!" she said anxiously. "What are you doing home? What's the matter? What happened?"

"Aah, the same old stuff." I said. "What's new?"

"Holdie, what are you doing home?" she said. She's only ten, but when she wants an answer she wants an answer.

"What's the matter with your arm?" I asked her. I noticed a hunk of adhesive tape on her arm.

"I banged it on the wardrobe doors," she said. "Miss Keefe made me Monitor of the Wardrobe. I'm in charge of everybody's garments." But she got right back to it again. "Holdie," she said, "what are you doing home?"

She sounds like a goody-good, but it was only

when it came to me. That's because she likes me. She's no goody-good, though, Phoebe's strictly one of us, for a kid.

"I'll be back in a minute." I told her, and I went back in the living room and got some cigarettes out of one of the boxes, put them in my pocket; then I went back. Phoebe was sitting up straight, looking fine. I sat down on her bed again.

"I got kicked out again." I told her.

"Holden!" she said. "Daddy'll kill you."

"I couldn't help it, Phoeb." I said. "They kept shoving stuff at me, exams and all, and study periods, and everything was compulsory all the time. I was going crazy. I just didn't like it."

"But, Holden," Phoebe said. "you don't like *anything*." She really looked worried.

"You, I do. Yes, I do. Don't say that, Phoeb," I said. "I like a heck of a lot of stuff."

Phoebe said, "What? Name one thing."

"I don't know. Gosh, I don't know," I told her. "I can't think any more today. I like girls I haven't met yet; girls that you can just see the backs of their heads, a few seats ahead of you on the train. I like a million thing. I like sitting here with you. No kidding, Phoeb. I like just sitting here with you."

"Go to bed, Viola," Phoebe said. Viola was up. "She squeezes right out through the bare," Phoebe told me.

I picked up Viola and sat her on my lap. A crazy kid if ever there was one, but strictly one of us.

"Holdie," Viola said, "make Jeannette give me Donald Duck."

"Viola insulted Jeannette, and Jeannette took away her Donald Duck," Phoebe said.

"Her breath is always all the time bad," Viola told me.

"Her *breath*," Phoebe said. "She told Jeannette her breath was bad. When Jeannette was putting on her leggings."

"Jeannette *breathes* on me all the time," Viola said, sanding on me.

I asked Viola if she had missed me, but she looked as though she weren't sure whether or not I'd been away.

"Go on back to bed now, Viola," Phoebe said.

"She squeezes right out through the bars."

"Jeannette breathes on me all the time and she took away Donald Duck," Viola told me again.

"Holden'll get it back," Phoebe told her. Phoebe wasn't like other kids. She didn't take sides with the maid.

I GOT up and carried Viola back to her crib and put her in it. She asked me to bring her something, but I couldn't understand her.

"Ovvels," Phoebe said. "Olives. She's crazy about olives now. She wants to eat olives all the time. She rang the elevator bell when Jeannette was out this afternoon and had Pete open up a can of olives for her."

"Ovveles," Viola said. "Bring ovvels, Holdie."

"Okay," I said.

"With the red in them," Viola said.

I told her okay, and said to go to sleep. I tucked her in, then I started to go back where Phoebe was, only I stopped so short it almost hurt. I heard them come in.

"That's *them*!" Phoebe whispered. "I can bear *Daddy*!"

I nodded, and walked toward the door. I took off my hat.

"*Holdie*!" Phoebe whispered at me. "Tell 'em how sorry you are. All that stuff. And how you'll do better next time!"

I just nodded.

"Come back!" Phoebe said. "I'll stay awake!"

I went out and shut the door. I wished I had hung up my coat and put away my bags. I knew they'd tell me how much the coat cost and how people tripped over bags and broke their necks.

When they were all done with me I went back to the kid's room. Phoebe was asleep, and I watched her a while. Nice kid. Then I went over to Viola's crib. I lifted her blanket and put her Donald Duck in there with her; then I took some olives I had in my left hand and laid them one by one in a row along the railing of her crib. One of them fell on the floor. I picked it up, felt dust on it, and put it in my jacket pocket. Then I left the room.

I went into my own room, turned the radio on, but it was broken. So I went to bed.

I lay awake for a pretty long time, feeling lousy. I knew everybody was right and I was wrong. I knew that I wasn't going to be one of those successful guys, that I was never going to be like Edward Gonzales or Theodore Fisher or Lawrence Meyer. I knew that this time when Father said

that I was going to work in that man's office that he meant it, that I wasn't going back to school again ever, that I wouldn't like working in an office. I started wondering again where the ducks in Central Park went when the lagoon was frozen over, and finally I went to sleep.

THE END

by J.D.Salinger
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