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We're not even allowed to talk about the truth, really. And it's so unpleasant most of us wouldn't want to anyway. That's what *The Catcher in the Rye* is all about. Phoniness is the stuff everyone's doing while avoiding the truth. And at some point you have to accept not being able to talk about it, and join in the game, or if you balk too long, you end up depressed as hell and in a hospital. I was one of the ones who ended up in a hospital. If you want to hear about it, I'll tell you. In a way it's like the poem *The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner*: "...that agony returns:/ And till my ghastly tale is told...." That's the way I feel about it sometimes, like I have to tell about it.

I guess I should start by saying that I read a lot growing up. I always saw reading books as hunting for treasure. But not many novels though, I always thought fiction was a waste of time when you could be reading about *reality*. I was assigned to read *The Catcher in the Rye* in junior high just like everyone. I never did. I got an F on the book report. The teacher who assigned it kept me after one day and asked why I hadn't read it. He was one of those guys with greasy hair, thick glasses, and big, slow, watery eyes.

I didn't listen to anything he was trying to tell me, and the next day I was on the way home from a hike when I saw a book in

the road. As I was getting closer I thought about it maybe being *that book*. Closer up I saw the cover was missing. I got to it and there it was spelled out in black and white on the crinkled-up title page. The day before, having the teacher ask why I hadn't read it, and seeing it there in the road—I didn't know what to think. I remember I got mad in a way and what I did next was kind of weird but, looking back, maybe was kind of natural. I had to take a leak. So I picked it up like it was something dead, threw it over some bushes, went back there and took a leak on it. It was one of those long leaks too. Just soaked the thing. That might've been *that*, but then I saw it again the next night.

I was walking out of the market down the street from my house, turned the corner and bumped into this girl. I'd just bought some Cracker Jacks and was digging through the box looking for the prize when we both came around the corner and bumped. My Cracker Jacks flew and she spilled her purse. There were lipsticks, make-ups and stuff all over. I knelt down to help pick it up and there a couple feet away was the book. I handed it to her. One of the last things she picked up was the prize from my Cracker Jacks. "I think this is yours," she said. She was older than I was, like in twelfth grade. She was hot. I remember she was wearing a hat—a bowler—and her smooth brown bangs were flush down along her cheeks. She said Thanks and took off. I remember the prize was one of those little magnifying glasses you could use to burn your initials in stuff.

That was the last I saw or heard of it for years. Then I moved up to Santa Barbara to work for my dad—he owns a pharmacy. I moved because life down in Los Angeles started to get to me. My friends started to get on my nerves. We all grew up surfing and hanging out down at the beach. We talked the same, got drunk at the same parties, got in little squabbles, all that. But it started to

seem like I couldn't shoot the shit the same as I used to. And even when I did, sometimes I felt like I was acting. I once read how patterns of thought get going in cliques and how it's tough to bust through them, and that's why some people never change, because the people they hang with don't. My dad mentioned he could use some help, so I moved.

I looked for a place to live for about a week. I wanted a place good for writing because I was working on a book of my own. It's a story about a cowboy—a Drifter—and how he gets a job as caretaker of a mansion, and how it turns out to be haunted by a Ghost Lady. I made it into a screenplay, but nobody wanted it. I got it into the hands of an agent for a big agency, and got rejected. That was another reason I moved, my brilliant script got turned down. I had talked it up pretty good while I was working on it too.

Before I moved I had a place lined up in case I didn't find anything better, but I checked the paper one last time and found a new ad about some rustic house on a mountainside. I called the number and got the answering machine. I left a message the first time, then hung up every other time until a girl answered. Before she gave directions she asked if I smoked or used drugs. I said No to both. I'll only smoke cigarettes if I've had a few beers at a party or wedding or something, and I hadn't smoked pot for a while. I told her I'd stop by after work.

The house was on Mountain Drive above Montecito. I drove up along the tree-lined roads, with all the mansion front gates, rolling lawns, manicured gardens. She said to look for an old driveway next to a bunch of mailboxes. I found it. The driveway was barely a driveway, more pothole than asphalt. I wheeled up the thing and came to the house. It was old too.

Set on an outcropping, the yard had a small deck, and from it was an incredible view—over Montecito, over downtown Santa

Barbara, the harbor, the ocean, the islands across the channel. You could see the coast from Isla Vista to down past Summerland. You could see a handful of oil derricks in the channel—which you’d think would ruin it, but they kind of added a depth of view to the ocean between the islands and the shore. At night they lit up and looked like little crystal ships, sometimes with a visible flame.

The house was custom—two-story-high ceilings, huge rough-hewn beams, Spanish tile floors. It’s known in the neighborhood as the Castle. I found that out one morning waiting for a ride to work. I was at the foot of the driveway when a lady came along walking her two Irish setters. They ran over, sniffing and wagging their tails. The lady asked if I was new to the neighborhood, I said Yeah and pointed to where I lived. “Oh, the Castle,” she said.

“Whaddaya mean?”

“Oh, there’s a book about it. Back in the 60s they used to have parties there. The owners hosted a wine festival put on by artists of the area. Later, a record producer owned it. Hendrix and Joplin used to hang out there.”

“Hendrix hung out there?”

“Yeah. The Doors once played a party right over on Coyote Road too.”

“Wow. Were you around then?”

“Oh, no. My husband and I’ve only been here a few years. But I did some research when we first moved in,” she said. “Welcome to the neighborhood.”

Later that night after work, I cracked some beers, dug through CD’s, and cranked Hendrix and Doors in front of the fireplace. Oh, and the fireplace there—it was *huge*. It was neat too because there were bits of graffiti carved all over the rock that

made up the hearth and mantle. Most had been carved a while ago, all covered with smoke soot. I was always looking for a Jimi or Janis or Jim carved somewhere. There was a big M-O-T-H-E-R carved right in the middle of the mantle. The friends who came up to visit, I always told them Morrison did that one.

There was another carving I found that cracked me up—a peace sign, a plus sign, a heart, an equals sign, and a zero. Peace plus love equals zero—or nothingness. I pictured some guy all stoned back in the 60s or 70s carving it and thinking that that was *It*—which it probably is in some way.

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I'd been living there at the Castle for about a month, when one weekend I was sitting on my bed reading *Rolling Stone*. There was an interview with an actress I was crazy about and it mentioned how much she loved *The Catcher in the Rye*. I thought about going out and getting it so I'd have something for conversation if I ever met her.

I'm sitting there daydreaming about her, when there's a knock on the front door. I answer it and it's the guy who'd moved out of the room I'd moved into. He'd stopped to check for messages or mail. I asked a few questions about the place, and as he was leaving he saw my skateboard and asked, "You been over to the Tea Gardens?"

"No. What's that?"

"There's a place down the road, an old abandoned property you can skate. It's got some pretty big bowls."

"Why do they call it the Tea Gardens?"

"Back in the 20s some lady had the mountainside landscaped

as a place to drink her morning tea. She was really into goldfish and imported them from around the world, so there's all these rad empty bowls to skate."

"Awesome."

"Just hop the gate and follow the trail, but be careful, the sheriff goes up there. You can get busted."

He left, and a little later I skated down to check it out. There was a big old iron gate set in a wall of sandstone blocks. I climbed over and went up the trail that led back into the property. A walkway led through a forest of different types of trees and overgrown hedges. The spiders were having a field day, there were giant webs all over.

The guy said to look for a line of oak trees. I went up along it and found the thing. It was a huge concrete bowl perfect for skating. It must've really been something back when it was built. There were big sandstone vases, cracked and crumbling, lining elaborate brickwork, and colorful tiles all along the edge. Instead of skating right then, I explored.

The path meandered along the steep hillsides all the way to the top. There, the property was a terrace with high sandstone arches and a view more incredible than the one from the Castle—which you could actually see down below, a couple ridges over.

There was a fountain and pond at the arches, and from them ran tributaries emptying into ponds that got bigger and bigger down the mountainside until they ended up in the one huge bowl at the bottom, the one you could skate.

No one was around that day. It was a gnarly little drop. Once I got it wired, found where all the smooth transitions were, I had a blast. After a while, I sat up on the edge to take a break and daydream about that actress. I looked out over the bowl. Even though

it was huge, it was covered with graffiti—all kinds of surfing logos, skating logos, Fuck This, Fuck That, and Fuck You. Typical. I sat there and then for the heck of it let my board roll down into the bowl. It dropped to the bottom, shot up the other side, hit a pebble or crack, and flipped over. It slid back down a bit and stopped. I looked over for a second and then saw it, graffiti in the same colors as the cover—*The Catcher in the Rye*.

Just reading the stuff about the actress and how much she loved it, and remembering the stuff from when I was in junior high—I was pretty anxious to read it at that point.

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Holden Caulfield is a crack-up! He's awesome. How great would it be to hang out with Holden for the day?! Back when I was his age, in my teens, I made up my mind I wasn't going to pretend at knowing it all. That was going to be my *knowing it all*—knowing I *didn't* know it all. I was afraid of losing a sense of wonder, and I wanted to be free to say, "I don't know." Which I guess is similar to not wanting to deal with phoniness.

Maybe Caulfield and I were the same in some ways, but there were way more differences. When I was young, we used to race Big Wheels and skateboards down the hills of our neighborhood. We used to have demolition derbies, and I was good at wiping other kids out. I took stuff out on kids in a way I don't think Caulfield would have. I threw mud in the eyes of this kid once. I said mean things. Most of it was before I knew better, and in my own defense, I have to say there were times when I helped, got kids included if they were left out, stuff like that. I was bad, but I wasn't all bad. Also, back then, for about a year I was a terror with a pellet gun. It was birds only. There was a grove of oak trees

behind the high school. It was like a bird depot, and friends and I used to sit there and nail one after the other. But all that ended the day I killed a squirrel passing through the trees in our backyard. He was fifteen, twenty feet up. I took a shot and he stopped. We stared at each other while I pumped the gun again. His stare is still vivid in my mind. Personified, it was like, "You're not gonna kill me are you, you asshole?" I put him in the sights and his stare seemed to go, "Don't do it—don't do it—*you asshole.*" I pulled the trigger, he hung on the branch a moment, eyes glazed, and he dropped. I still remember the sound made on the carpet of leaves as he hit and slid to a stop in a rustle. Besides bugs, that was the last time I killed something intentionally.

I used to steal constantly too. I used to be a major klepto. Every time I walked into a store I'd pocket something. I used to wander around bookstores quite a bit—I used to have my own library until I had to sell it for rent.

Another thing about Caulfield though is, he went through his madman stuff in the 40s. When he got all depressed, dealing with life, and went into a bar, there was Big Band music playing—Goodman, Gershwin. What if he looked up and instead of seeing Ernie at the piano, he saw Hendrix ripping a Stratocaster? With neon go-go girls writhing on top of guitar amps? Or if he heard groups from Led Zeppelin to Nirvana?

Adolescent madman stuff will always go on, but I wonder if it's really any different for each era. I mean, I remember when computers started to get big, and the Internet took off, and news, entertainment and advertising merged, and people would say things like, "It's never been like this—things are crazier than ever!" But is that true? Is the craziness different, or is it the same, only with newer, sleeker gadgets?

I grew up in the Santa Monica Mountains between the San Fernando Valley and Malibu. That's where we moved to after my mom and dad got divorced and she got remarried. I was about four years old. The one clear memory I have of my *biological* dad was from the last day I saw him. He picked up my older brother and me to take us for the day. He took us to Olvera Street, downtown. There were Spanish ladies dancing, and Spanish guys playing trumpets, guitars, violins. There were piñatas and trinkets all over the place, the smell of grilled beef, churros. At one point he said I could pick out a toy from a chest full of stuff. It was a little painted wooden horse. I used to carry it around everywhere, hop it along the furniture in passing.

After the divorce was final, my mom got remarried to the dad I have now—the pharmacist. I didn't always consider him my dad. When I was in the judge's chamber that day, I was old enough to know this new guy wasn't my real dad. I was the biggest little bastard back then. I used to hurt his feelings all the time. I cringe remembering. Once, when we stopped for dinner after work, I went into how sorry I was for being an idiot when I was younger. He told me it was the past, that I wasn't that bad, and to forget about it. When I asked about my biological dad, all he knew was that he seemed like a nice guy the couple times they'd met, and that he must've been too young to handle my mom and three kids.

When I asked my mom, all she ever said was that he was a drunk and wouldn't talk about him. My brother told about a night she got us out of bed, put us in the car and drove to a local bar. We waited there—I was asleep—until my dad came out drunk, a woman on each arm, before noticing us in the car.

What my granddad, my mom's dad, told me is pretty much what remains in my mind about my biological dad. He said he used to ride in rodeos, and that in the 50s he won Saddle-Bronc Class, State Champ at the Cow Palace in San Francisco. He said he loved us but couldn't settle down, and they ended up getting divorced. My granddad said he'd heard he'd died and wouldn't have been surprised with the way he lived. I had a dream where he was on a horse in a meadow, his face shadowed by his hat.

When my mom got remarried, there was my older brother, younger sister, two new brothers from my new dad, and myself. A couple years later another brother came along and *that's the way we became the Brady Bunch*. I remember watching reruns of that show and how it normalized what I thought, like, Oh, we're a Brady Bunch-type family.

That's really all you need to know about my family. I could go on, about camping trips, going to the beach most weekends after church—all that. But I don't want to drag them into this. In this case it's really true what they say, never judge a person by their relatives.

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There're a couple other things to tell. When I was four, my brother and the baby-sitter used to watch reruns of old TV shows. I remember this one show with a pretty blonde girl in it, and one day I was going through a shoe box of my brother's stuff when I find a stack of bubble-gum cards—cards they'd put out of the show. I started flipping through them and separated the ones with the blonde girl from the rest. Then I came across one of just her. I got dizzy. I swear, an actual physical sensation occurred as I looked at it. I was crazy about her. I even got into a routine where

I'd go and just sit and stare at that card of her. I'd even kiss it.

There was another TV show they used to watch. The show was *Batman* but the thing that drove me wild was *Catwoman*. I always thought Batman was stupid for not getting around to kissing her. I was glued to the set when there was an episode with *Catwoman* on.

To sum up, kissing the girl's bubble-gum card and not knowing exactly what I wanted to do with *Catwoman* but knowing I wanted to do something, I have to say, I was crazy about females at an unusually young age—I mean, I got hassled by other guys in kindergarten for kissing girls.

But I did meet *Catwoman*. When I was living at the Castle there seemed to be some kind of bizarre coincidence going on all the time. Or one that took place over a couple of days, a week or something—like this one when I met *Catwoman*.

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It started when I was going through a bookstore. I was on a lunch break in a sandwich shop, and they had a comic book section in the back. As a kid I never read comics. Some friends down the street had them. I knew all the heroes—Superman, Batman, Spiderman—but had never really read them. This one day though, I started going through this comic book section. The reason was because of what I was reading at the time. I was into the book they made about the series *The Power of Myth* with Joseph Campbell. And I'd already read through a lot of Jung, so I was well into the investigation of archetypal stuff.

I came across this comic titled *Catwoman*, and curious about how she'd be portrayed, I got it. Later that night, flipping through

the channels on TV, I happened to land on an old episode of *Batman*—one with Catwoman. It's the one where she's trying to get hold of some golden cat statues.

The comic was one in a series of four, and for the rest of the week I tracked down the other three. Calling around to comic book stores, I found out a little about them.

There're different ages in comics. There's the Golden Age, when they first appeared in the 40s through the 50s. Then the Silver Age, from the 60s to 70s, and the Modern Age. A guy at one store knew everything—a comic book fiend. I asked questions like, what heroes were around in the Golden Age that are still around now, and how they've changed through the ages. I asked about Catwoman, and what's weird is that in the Golden Age, Batman *marries* Catwoman. They even have a kid, a girl who grows up to be the Huntress. Isn't that unreal? In the Golden Age, Batman and Catwoman get married. Archetypally it's pretty fascinating.

After getting the other three comics through the mail, that weekend I went back down to LA to work a parade. I had a job sometimes where I'd pull a cart along parade routes. It's an old surfer thing—some of the older guys figured out you could buy a cotton-candy maker, weld some carts together, and make a lot of cash selling stuff on the weekends.

The parade that day was in Brentwood. The crew who did parades, we all knew each other from school or surfing, hanging down at Rockbed. The parade started, we got out on the route, and I was doing horrible because I'd made the mistake of taking a couple hits off a joint that went around as we set up. I get all self-conscious when I get stoned. I mean when I first started getting stoned, I never did. But what usually took place when I got stoned, I'd go to the end of the route, pull the ice chest out from

under the cart, sit down and watch the parade. I'd only end up selling stuff if people came over for something.

That day in Brentwood though, I was at the end, sitting there watching, when a kid came up to get a balloon. I got the color they wanted, turned around to hand it over, and there in the parade, up on the back seat of a convertible, was Catwoman. She was wearing a sundress and broad-brimmed hat. She had her arm around a disabled kid. There was a banner alongside the car for a charity. I felt like I had to say something.

In the center of that part of San Vicente, there's an island of grass with big old coral trees. At the very end of the route the cars in the parade were making a U-turn and coming up the street on the other side of the grass island. So I hauled my cart across the island quick—except not that quick, because I'd gotten stoned, which meant I hadn't been walking the route selling stuff, and my ice chest was full of cokes and heavy, and the cart wheels kept getting stuck in the grass. But I got to the other side and watched her car. I had no idea what to say. The guy driving didn't look like he'd slow down. I decided against waving for them to stop.

So the car's coming right at me, she's looking over at the parade, and within about twenty yards I call out. She turned towards me, raising her hand to the top of her hat as the brim blew up and we made eye contact. "I love you," I said. Her eyes stayed with mine as she passed within a few feet. She made a sexy little cat sound.

It turns out the four comics are already worth something. I was in another store not long ago and asked. They said the art and story line are good as far as comics go, and the whole set is worth something. The story line that runs through it is archetypal of course. For instance in the comic, Catwoman has a long-lost sister who's a nun, and when Catwoman's old pimp kidnaps her,

she gets some shady character to teach her how to fight and knock guys out—except it ends up taking Batman to save the nun. It's all archetypal, just more refined.

I guess I should tell you how I even found out about archetypal stuff in the first place. What happened is, one night I met this lady, the Goddess Lady.