

YOU CALL THAT ART? – S4: Immoral art?

The Catcher in the Rye, J. D. Salinger, 1951, chapter 10

Except for a few pimpy-looking¹ guys, and a few whory-looking² blondes, the lobby was pretty empty. But you could hear the band playing in the Lavender Room, and so I went in there. It wasn't very crowded, but they gave me a lousy³ table anyway – way in the back. I should've waved a buck under the head-waiter's nose. In New York, boy, money really talks – I'm not kidding.

The band was putrid. Buddy Singer. Very brassy⁴, but not good brassy – corny⁵ brassy. Also, there were very few people around my age in the place. In fact, nobody was around my age. They were mostly old, show-off y-looking guys with their dates. Except at the table right next to me. At the table right next to me, there were these three girls around thirty or so. The whole three of them were pretty ugly, and they all had on the kind of hats that you knew they didn't really live in New York, but one of them, the blonde one, wasn't too bad. She was sort of cute, the blonde one, and I started giving her the old eye a little bit, but just then the waiter came up for my order. I ordered a Scotch and soda, and told him not to mix it – I said it fast as hell, because if you hem and haw, they think you're under twenty-one and won't sell you any intoxicating liquor. I had trouble with him anyway, though. "I'm sorry, sir," he said, "but do you have some verification of your age? Your driver's license, perhaps?"

I gave him this very cold stare, like he'd insulted the hell out of me, and asked him, "Do I look like I'm under twenty-one?"

"I'm sorry, sir, but we have our –"

"Okay, okay," I said. I figured the hell with it. "Bring me a Coke." He started to go away, but I called him back. "Can'tcha stick a little rum in it or something?" I asked him. I asked him very nicely and all. "I can't sit in a corny place like this cold sober. Can'tcha stick a little rum in it or something?"

"I'm very sorry, sir..." he said, and beat it on me. I didn't hold it against him, though. They lose their jobs if they get caught selling to a minor. I'm a goddam minor.

I started giving the three witches at the next table the eye again. That is, the blonde one. The other two were strictly from hunger. I didn't do it crudely, though. I just gave all three of them this very cool glance and all. What they did, though, the three of them, when I did it, they started giggling like morons⁶. They probably thought I was too young to give anybody the once-over⁷. That annoyed hell out of me – you'd've thought I wanted to marry them or something. I should've given them the freeze, after they did that, but the trouble was, I really felt like dancing. I'm very fond of dancing, sometimes, and that was one of the times. So all of a sudden, I sort of leaned over and said, "Would any of you girls care to dance?" I didn't ask them crudely or anything. Very suave, in fact. But God damn it, they thought that was a panic, too. They started giggling some more. I'm not kidding, they were three real morons. "C'mon," I said. "I'll dance with you one at a time. All right? How 'bout it? C'mon!" I really felt like dancing.

1. pimpy: a pimp (slang) is a man who exploits prostitutes
2. whory: a whore (slang) is a prostitute
3. lousy: (informal) awful
4. brassy: loud
5. corny: sentimental
6. moron: idiot
7. to give someone the once-over (informal): to look at someone in a quick way

- ♥ *What is happening in the extract?*
- ♥ *What is morally shocking?*