

A Secret Slob

I DIDN'T HAVE anything special to do, so I went down to the can and chewed the rag with him while he was shaving. We were only ones in the can, because everybody was still down at the game. It was hot as hell and the windows were all steamy. There were about ten washbowls, all right against the wall. Stradlater had the middle one. I sat down on the one right next to him and started turning the cold water on and off—this nervous habit I have. Stradlater kept whistling “Song of India” while he shaved. He had one of those very piercing whistles that are practically never in tune, and he always picked out some song that’s hard to whistle even if you`re a *good* whistler, like “Song of India” or “Slaughter on Tenth Avenue”. He could really mess a song up.

You remember I said before that Ackley was a slob in his personal habits? Well, so was Stradlater, but in a different way. Stradlater was more of a secret slob. He always *looked* all right, Stradlater, but for instance, you should’ve seen the razor he shaved himself with. It was always rusty as hell and full of lather and hairs and crap. He never cleaned it or anything. He always *looked* good when he was finished fixing himself up, but he was a secret slob anyway, if you knew him the way I did. The reason he fixed himself up to look good was because he was madly in love with himself. He thought he was the handsomest guy in the Western Hemisphere. He *was* pretty handsome, too - I’ll admit it. But he was mostly the kind of a handsome guy that if your parents saw his picture in your Year Book, they’d right away say, “Who’s *this* boy?” I mean he was mostly a Year Book kind of handsome guy. I knew a lot of guys at Pencey I thought were a lot handsomer than Stradlater, but they wouldn’t look handsome if you their pictures in the Year Book. They’d look like they had big noses or their ears stuck out. I’ve had that experience frequently.

Anyway, I was sitting in the washbowl next to where Stradlater was shaving, sort of turning the water on and off. I still had my red hunting hat on, with the peak around to the back and all. I really got a bang out of that hat.

“Hey,” Stradlater said. “Wanna do me a big favor?”

“What?” I said. Not too enthusiastic. He was always asking to do him a big favor. You take a very handsome guy, or a guy that thinks he’s real hot-shot, and they’re always asking to do them a big favor.

Just because *there’re* crazy about themselves, they think *you’re* crazy about them, too, and that you’re just dying to do them a favor. It’s sort of funny, in a way.

“You goin` out tonight?” he said.

“I might. I might not. I don’t know. Why?”

“I got about a hundred pages to read for history for Monday,” he said. “How`bout writing a composition for me, for English? I’ll be up the creek if I don’t get the goddam thing in by Monday, the reason I ask. How`bout it?”

It was very ironical. It really was.

“*I’m* the one that’s flunking out of the goddam place, and *you’re* asking me to write you a goddam composition,” I said.

“Yeah, I know. The thing is, though, I’ll be up the creek if I don’t get it in. Be a buddy. Be a buddyroo. Okay?”

I didn’t answer him right away. Suspense is good for some bastards like Stradlater.

“What on?” I said.

“Anything. Anything descriptive. A room. Or a house. Or something you once lived in or something - *you* know. Just as long as it’s descriptive as hell.” He gave out a big yawn while he said that. Which is something that gives me a royal pain in the ass. I mean if somebody *yawns* right while they’re asking to do them a goddam favor. “Just don’t do it *too* good, is all,” he said. “That sonuvabitch Hartzell thinks you’re a hot-shot in English, and he knows you’re my roommate. So I mean don’t stick all commas and stuff in the right place.”

That’s something else that gives me a royal pain. I mean if you’re good at writing compositions and somebody starts talking about commas. Stradlater was always doing that. He wanted you to think that the only reason *he* was lousy at writing compositions was because he stuck all the commas in the wrong place. He was a little bit like Ackley, that way. I once sat next to Ackley at this basketball game. We had a terrific guy on the team, Howie Coyle, that could sink them from the middle of the floor, without even touching the backboard or anything. Ackley kept saying, the whole goddam game, that Coyle had a perfect *build* for basketball. God, how I hate that stuff.

(after J D Salinger)