

Read the text and decide if you sympathise with the narrator.

### It kills me...

Even though it was so late, old Ernie's was jam-packed. Mostly with prep school jerks and college jerks. Almost every damn school in the world gets out earlier for Christmas vacation than the schools I go to. You could hardly check your coat, it was so crowded. It was pretty quiet, though, because Ernie was playing the piano. It was supposed to be something *holy*, for God's sake, when he sat down at the piano. Nobody's *that* good. About three couples, besides me, were waiting for tables, and they were all shoving and standing on tiptoes to get a look at old Ernie while he played. He had a big damn mirror in front of the piano, with this big spotlight on him, so that everybody could watch his face while he played. You couldn't see his *fingers* while he played—just his big old face. Big deal. I'm not too sure what the name of the song was that he was playing when I came in, but whatever it was, he was really stinking it up. He was putting all these dumb, show-offy ripples in the high notes, and a lot of other very tricky stuff that gives me a pain in the ass. You should've heard the crowd, though, when he was finished. You would've puked. They went mad. They were exactly the same morons that laugh like hyenas in the movies at stuff that isn't funny. I swear to God, if I were a piano player or an actor or something and all those dopes thought I was terrific, I'd hate it. I wouldn't even want them to *clap* for me. People always clap for the wrong things. If I were a piano player, I'd play it in the goddam closet. Anyway, when he was finished, and everybody was clapping their heads off, old Ernie turned around on his stool and gave this very phony, *humble* bow. Like as if he was a helluva humble guy, besides being a terrific piano player. It was very phony—I mean him being such a big snob and all. In a funny way, though, I felt sort of sorry for him when he was finished. I don't even think he *knows* any more when he's playing right or not. It isn't all his fault. I partly blame all those dopes that clap their heads off—they'd foul up *anybody*, if you gave them a chance. Anyway, it made me feel depressed and lousy again, and I damn near got my coat back and went back to the hotel, but it was too early and I didn't feel much like being all alone.

They finally got me this stinking table, right up against a wall and behind a goddam post, where you couldn't see anything. It was one of those tiny little tables that if the people at the next table don't get up to let you by – and they never *do*, the bastards – you practically have to *climb* into your chair. I ordered a Scotch and soda, which is my favorite drink, next to frozen Daiquiris. If you were only around six years old, you could get liquor at Ernie's, the place was so dark and all, and besides, nobody cared how old you were. You could even be a dope fiend and nobody'd care.

I was surrounded by jerks. I'm not kidding. At this other tiny table, right to my left, practically on *top* of me, there was this funny-looking guy and this funny-looking girl. They were around my age, or maybe just a little older. It was funny. You could see they were being careful as hell not to drink up the minimum too fast. I listened to their conversation for a while, because I didn't have anything else to do. He was telling her about some pro football game he'd seen that afternoon. He gave her every single goddam play in the whole game—I'm not kidding. He was the most boring guy I ever listened to. And you could tell his date wasn't even interested in the goddam game, but she was even funnier-looking than *he* was, so I guess she *had* to listen. Real ugly girls have it tough. I feel so sorry for them sometimes. Sometimes I can't even look at them, especially if they're with some dopey guy that's telling them all about a

goddam football game. On my *right*, the conversation was even worse, though. On my right there was this very Joe Yale-looking guy, in a gray flannel suit and one of those flitty-looking Tattersall vests. All those Ivy League bastards look alike. My father wants me to go to Yale, or maybe Princeton, but I swear, I wouldn't go to one of those Ivy League colleges, if I was dying, for God's sake. Anyway, this Joe Yale-looking guy had a terrific-looking girl with him. Boy, she was good-looking. But you should've heard the conversation they were having. In the first place, they were both slightly crooked. What he was doing, he was giving her a feel under the table, and at the same time telling her all about some guy in his dorm that had eaten a whole bottle of aspirin and nearly committed suicide. His date kept saying to him, "How *horrible*... Don't, darling. Please, don't. Not here." Imagine giving somebody a feel and telling them about a guy committing suicide at the same time! They killed me.

(J D Salinger, *Catcher in the Rye*)

**Explanations:***Ivy League*

a group of colleges and universities in the north-eastern United States that are widely regarded as high in academic and social prestige: Harvard (established 1636), Yale (1701), Pennsylvania (1740), Princeton(1746), Columbia (1754), Brown (1764), Dartmouth (1769), and Cornell (1865). They are members of an athletic conference for intercollegiate football and other sports known as the Ivy League.