

BREAKFAST AT TIFFANY'S

TRUMAN
CAPOTE

Holly Golightly, glittering socialite traveller, generally upwards, sometimes sideways and once in a while down.

She's a shoplifter, a delight, a drifter, a tease.

She's up all night drinking cocktails and breaking hearts.

She hasn't got a past.

She doesn't want to belong to anything or anyone.

Not to 'Rusty' Trawler, the blue-chinned, cuff-shooting millionaire man about women about town:

Not to Salvatore 'Sally' Tomato, the Mafia sugar-daddy doing life in Sing Sing.

Not to a starving writer.

Not even to her one-eyed rag-bag pirate of a cat.

One day Holly might find

somewhere *she* belongs.

Until then she's travelling.



I took a taxi in a downpour of October rain,
and on my way I even thought she might be there,
that I would see Holly again.

Holly Golightly had been a tenant in the old brownstone;
she'd occupied the apartment below mine.

she would wash her hair,
and together with the cat,
a red tiger-striped tom,
sit out on the fire escape thumbing a guitar
while her hair dried.

Whenever I heard the music,
I would go stand quietly by my window.

I went out into the hall and leaned over the banister,
just enough to see without being seen.
It was a warm evening, nearly summer,
and she wore a slim cool black dress,
black sandals, a pearl choker.

For all her chic thinness,
she had an almost soap and lemon cleanness,
a rough pink darkening in the cheeks.

Her mouth was large, her nose upturned.
A pair of dark glasses blotted out her eyes.

It was a face beyond childhood,
yet this side of belonging to a woman.

She was not alone.
There was a man following behind her.
The way his plump hand clutched at her hip
seemed somehow improper;
not morally, aesthetically.

It was no novelty to encounter suspicious specimens
among Holly's callers, quite the contrary

When they reached her door
she rummaged her purse in search of a key,
and took no notice of the fact
that his thick lips were
nuzzling the nape of her neck.

A petition
among the brownstone's
other tenants
asking them to join her
in having Miss Golightly evicted:
she was,
said Madame Spanella,
'morally objectionable'
'perpetrator of all-night gatherings
that endanger the safety and sanity
of her neighbours'.

Though I refused to sign,
secretly I felt Madame Spanella
had cause to complain.

But her petition failed,
and as April approached May,
the open-windowed, warm spring nights
were lurid with the party sounds,
the loud-playing gramophone,
and martini laughter
that emanated from Apt. 2.

'You know so much,
where is she?'
Dead.
Or in a crazy house.
Or married.

'Hold on,' he said,
gripping my wrist.
'Sure I loved her.
But it wasn't that
I wanted to touch her.'

I have a memory
of spending many
hither and yonning
days with Holly;
and it's true,
we did at odd moments
see a great deal of each other;
but on the whole, the memory is false.



We were in the front room, where, though it was now nearly March, the enormous Christmas tree, turned brown and scentless, still occupied most of the space.

She sat down on one of the rickety red-velvet chairs, curved her legs underneath her, and glanced round the room, her eyes puckering more pronouncedly.

'How can you bear it? It's a chamber of horrors.'

'Oh, you get used to anything,' I said, annoyed with myself, for actually I was proud of the place.

'I don't. I'll never get used to anything.'

Anybody that does, they might as well be dead.'

Her dispraising eyes surveyed the room again.

'Darling. How do you feel?'

'Fine.'

'But you haven't any pulse.'

'Then I must be dead.'

'No, idiot. This is serious. Look at me.'

Honestly, I don't feel anything. Except ashamed.'

'Please. Are you sure? Tell me the truth. You might have been killed.'

'But I wasn't. And thank you. For saving my life. You're wonderful. Unique. I love you.'

'Damn fool.' She kissed me on the cheek. I fainted dead away.

The window was turning blue.

A sunrise breeze banded the curtains.

'What is today?'

'Thursday.'

'Thursday.' She stood up.

'My God,' she said, and sat down again with a moan.

'It's too gruesome.'

I was tired enough not to be curious.

She sprang back, sat up, starting for the window and the fire escape,

'I hate snoops. You've had that feeling?'

'Quite often. Some people call it *angst*.'

'No,' she said slowly.

'No, the blues are because you're getting fat or maybe it's been raining too long.'

'You're sad, that's all. But the mean reds are horrible.'

'You're afraid and you sweat like hell,

but you don't know what you're afraid of.

Except something bad is going to happen,

only you don't know what it is.

All right. *Angst*. But what do you do about it?'

'Well, a drink helps.'

'I've tried that. I've tried aspirin, too.'

I should smoke marijuana, and I did for a while, but it only makes me giggle.

What I've found does the most good is just to get into a taxi and go to Tiffany's.

It calms me down right away, the quietness and the proud look of it;

nothing very bad could happen to you there, not with those kind men in their nice suits,

and that lovely smell of silver and alligator wallets.

I could find a real-life place that made me feel like Tiffany's, then I'd buy some furniture and give the cat a name.

Holly lay back and yawned.

'It must be winter sometime.'

'It rains, that I know. Heat. Rain. J-j-jungles.'

'Heat. Jungles. Actually, I'd like that.'

'Better you than me.'

'Yes,' said Holly,

with a sleepiness that was not sleepy.

'Better me than you.'

His speech had a jerky metallic rhythm, like a teletype.

'So,' he said, 'what do you think: is she or ain't she?'

'Ain't she what?'

'A phony.'

'I wouldn't have thought so.'

'You're wrong. She is a phony.'

But on the other hand you're right.

She isn't a phony because she's a *real* phony.

She believes all this crap she believes.

You can't talk her out of it.

I've tried with tears running down my cheeks.

Mind you,' he said, 'I like the kid.

Everybody does, but there's lots that don't. I do.

I sincerely like the kid. I'm sensitive, that's why.

You've got to be sensitive to appreciate her:

a streak of the poet.

I'm the first one saw her.

Out at Santa Anita.

I'm interested: professionally.

I find out she's some jock's regular,
she's living with the shrimp.

I get the jock told Drop It
if he don't want conversation with the vice boys:

see, the kid's fifteen.

My guess, nobody'll ever know where she came from.

She's such a goddamn liar,
maybe she don't know herself any more.

'I don't know we should help her at all.

She ought to be protected against herself.

Me, I feel like telling the cops.

'What scandals are you spreading, O. J.?'

Holly splashed into the room,
a towel more or less wrapped round her
and her wet feet
dripping footmarks on the floor.

'Just the usual. That you're nuts.'

'Fred knows that already.'

'But you don't.'

'I want you to behave, Rusty.'

She spoke softly, but there was a governess threat of punishment in her tone
that caused an odd flush of pleasure, of gratitude, to pink his face.

'You don't love me,' he complained, as though they were alone.

She sat up on the army cot, her face, her naked breasts
coldly blue in the sun-lamp light.

'It should take you about four seconds to walk from here to the door.
I'll give you two.'

He lost her to a quadrille of partners
who gobbled up her stammered jokes
like popcorn tossed to pigeons.

It was a comprehensible success.

She was a triumph over ugliness,

so often more beguiling than real beauty,
if only because it contains paradox.

In this case, as opposed to the scrupulous method
of plain good taste and scientific grooming,
the trick had been worked by exaggerating defects;
she'd made them ornamental
by admitting them boldly.

It was the master stroke, that stutter:
for it contrived to make her banalities
sound somehow original,

and secondly,

despite her tallness, her assurance,

it served to inspire in male listeners
a protective feeling.

Mag Wildwood was emptying ashtrays,
and after Holly had left the room,
she emptied another, then said, sighed rather:

'It's really very sad.'

But heaven knows, she *looks* healthy.

So, well, *clean*. That's the extraordinary part.

Wouldn't you,' she asked with concern, but of no one in particular,

'wouldn't you say she *looked* clean?'

Holly couldn't understand it, the abrupt absence of warmth on her return;
the conversations she began behaved like green logs, they fumed but would not fire.
More unforgivably, people were leaving without taking her telephone number.

Madame Sapphia Spanella met me in the hall, wild-eyed and wringing her hands.
'Run,' she said. 'Bring the police. She is killing somebody! Somebody is killing her!'
It sounded like it. As though tigers were loose in Holly's apartment.
A riot of crashing glass, of rippings and fallings and overturned furniture.
But there were no quarrelling voices inside the uproar which made it seem unnatural.
'Run,' shrieked Madame Spanella,
pushing me.
'Tell the police murder!'

Joe Bell shouted into the receiver:
'This is urgent, mister. Life and death.'
'My husband and I will positively sue any one who attempts to
connect our names with that ro-ro-rovo/ting and de-de-degenerate girl.
I always knew she was a hop-hop-head
with no more morals than a hound-bitch in heat.
Prison is where she belongs.
And my husband agrees
one thousand per cent.
We will positively sue anyone who -'
Hanging up.

Since no one prevented me, I followed them into the apartment, which was tremendously wrecked.
At last the Christmas tree had been dismantled, very literally:
its brown dry branches sprawled in a welter of torn-up books, broken lamps,
and gramophone records.

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with no more morals than a hound-bitch in heat.
Prison is where she belongs.
And my husband agrees
one thousand per cent.
We will positively sue anyone who -'
Hanging up.

Even the icebox had been emptied,
its contents tossed around the room:
raw eggs were sliding down the walls,
and in the midst of the debris
Holly's no-name cat was calmly
licking a puddle of milk.

In the bedroom,
the smell of smashed perfume

That evening, photographs of Holly
were front-paged by the late edition
of the *Journal-American*
and by the early editions
of both the *Daily News*
and the *Daily Mirror*.

'Don't forget,'
Holly managed to
instruct me as the
detectives propelled her
down the stairs,
'please feed the cat.'

In this squalid context even her clothes
(she was still wearing her riding costume, windbreaker, and blue jeans)
suggested a gang-moll hoeligan: an impression dark glasses, disarrayed coiffure,
and a Picayune cigarette dangling
from sullen lips did not
diminish.

June, July, all through the warm months she hibernated like
a winter animal who did not know spring had come and gone.
Her hair darkened, she put on weight. She became rather careless about her clothes:
used to rush round to the delicatessen wearing a rain-slicker and nothing underneath.

Which is not to imply that she had lost interest in life;
far from it, she seemed more content, altogether happier than I'd ever seen her.

she had decided it would be unwise of her to come near the brownstone.
Quite rightly, too: it was under surveillance, whether by police or reporters or other interested parties
one couldn't tell - simply a man, sometimes men, who hung around the stoop.

She was, I decided,
'a crude exhibitionist',
'a time waster', 'an utter fake':
someone never to be spoken to again.
And I didn't. Not for a long while.

We passed each other on the stairs with lowered eyes.

Excuse me,' I said, speaking to him via the mirror, 'but what do you want?'

'Son,' he said, 'I need a friend.'

'This here's no humorous matter, son. I'm a tired man. I've been five years lookin' for my woman.'

He blinked, he frowned. 'Her name's not Holly. [She was a Lula mae Barnes.]

When I married Lula mae, that was in December, 1938, she was going on fourteen.

Maybe an ordinary person, being only fourteen, wouldn't know their right mind.

But you take Lula mae, she was an exceptional woman.

Well, you never saw a more pitiful something.

Ribs sticking out everywhere, legs so puny they can't hardly stand,

teeth wobbling so bad they can't chew mush.

Story was: their mother, died of the TB, and their papa done the same

She knew good- and-well what she was doing when she promised to be my wife and the mother of my churren.

She plain broke our hearts when she ran off like she done.'

The notion of introducing Mrs Golightly to her husband had its satisfying aspects;

and, glancing up

at her lighted windows,

I hoped her friends were there,

for the prospect of watching the Texan shake hands

with Mag and Rusty and José was more satisfying still.



'Darling,' she instructed me, 'would you reach in the drawer there and give me my purse.'

A girl doesn't read this sort of thing without her lipstick.'

'My dearest little girl,

I have loved you knowing you were not as others.

But conceive of my despair upon discovering in such a brutal and public style

how very different you are from the manner of woman a man of my faith and career

could hope to make his wife. Verily I grieve for the disgrace of your present circumstance,

and do not find it in my heart to add my condemn to the condemn that surrounds you.

So I hope you will find it in your heart not to condemn me. I have my family to protect,

and my name, and I am a coward where those institutions enter. Forget me, beautiful child.

I am no longer here. I am gone home. But may God always be with you and your child.

Holly said:

'Kind, dear Mr Bell. Look at me, sir.'

He wouldn't.

'Never love a wild thing, Mr Bell,' Holly advised him.

That was Doc's mistake. He was always lugging home wild things.

But you can't give your heart to a wild thing:

the more you do, the stronger they get.

Until they're strong enough to run into the woods.

Or fly into a tree. Then a taller tree. Then the sky.

If you let yourself love a wild thing. You'll end up looking at the sky.

'She's drunk, eight martinis before dinner and enough wine to wash an elephant.' Joe Bell informed me.

He wrenched the flowers from the vase

and thrust them at her;

they missed their mark,

scattered on the floor.

'Good-bye,' he said; and,

as though he were going to vomit,

scurried to the men's room.

We heard the door lock.



'Good-bye?'

In rather a trance, I let her lead me down to the street.

As we rode in a cab across Central Park
it seemed to me as though I, too, were flying,
desolately floating over snow-peaked and perilous territory.

'But you can't. After all, what about. Well, what about.

Well, you can't *really* run off and leave every body.'

'I don't think anyone will miss me. I have no friends.'

So the days, the last days, blow about in memory,

hazy, autumnal, all alike as leaves:

until a day unlike any other I've lived.

'Let's steal something,' she said, pulling me into the store,

where at once there seemed a pressure of eyes,

as though we were already under suspicion.

Holly picked up a mask and slipped it over her face;

she chose another and put it on mine;

then she took my hand and we walked away.

Outside, we ran a few blocks, I think to make it more dramatic

We wore the masks all the way home.

They're from Tiffany's.

I don't want to own anything until I know

I've found the place where me and things belong together.

I'm not quite sure where that is just yet. But I know what it's like.'

We just met by the river one day: that's all, Independents, both of us.

We never made each other any promises. We never -'

She smiled, and let the cat drop to the floor.

'It's like Tiffany's,' she said.

'Not that I give a hoot about jewellery. Diamonds, yes.

But it's tacky to wear diamonds before you're forty;
and even that's risky. They only look right on the really old girls.

Wrinkles and bones, white hair and diamonds: I can't wait.

But that's not why I'm mad about Tiffany's.

she said, and her voice collapsed, a tic,

an invalid whiteness seized her face.

The car had paused for a traffic light.

Then she had the door open,

she was running down the street;

and I ran after her.

She looked not quite twelve



'But what about me?' she said, whispered, and shivered again. 'I'm very scared, Buster. Yes, at last. Because it could go on for ever. Not knowing what's yours until you've thrown it away. 'I'll have no part of it. If you're going to hell, you'll go on your own. With no further help from me.'

Apparently no attempt was made by American authorities to recover her, and soon the matter diminished to an occasional gossip-column mention; as a news story, it was revived only once: on Christmas Day, when Sally Tomato died of a heart attack at Sing Sing.

I sat down on Holly's bed, and hugged Holly's cat to me, and felt as badly for Holly, every iota, as she could feel for herself.

'But, Holly! It's dreadful!'
'I couldn't agree more;'
But at least it came from Tiffany's.
'I thought you wanted it.'

'See?' she shouted.
'It's great!'
And suddenly it was.
Suddenly, watching the tangled colours of Holly's hair flash in the red-yellow leaf light, I loved her enough to forget myself, my self-pitying despairs, and be content that something she thought happy was going to happen.

Very gently the horses began to trot, waves of wind splashed us, spanked our faces, we plunged in and out of sun and shadow pools, and joy, a glad-to-be-alive exhilaration, jolted through me like a jigger of nitrogen.