

REFLECTIONS IN A COFFEE SPOON

From the Novel

GETTING WHAT YOU WANT

by Fay Ellen Graetz

I toss my purse on the seat and we slide in the booth, Crystal and I facing Gordy. The coffee shop is decorated in white lattice and artificial ivy. Stamped in gold on the menu:

Tiffany's.

“*Breakfast at Tiffany's.* How funny,” I say, appreciative of a light topic. “Anybody read the book?”

“Truman Capote,” Gordy says flatly, behind his menu. “*In Cold Blood*’s more my style.”

The jerk. I poke Crystal in the ribs. “Ever see the movie?” No response. I doubt she’s seen it, but persist anyway. I just can’t take this heavy atmosphere anymore. “Audrey Hepburn plays Holly Golightly. Holly Golightly. Isn’t that a wonderful name, Crystal? Holly Golightly?”

Gordy lowers his menu. His eyes study Crystal as he keeps a grin in check. “That’s you, Crystal! You’re Holly Golightly.”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“Country girl struggles to make it big in New York.” He focuses on her with spot light

intensity. “And you’re Audrey Hepburn, too, sweetheart. Those big brown eyes. Silky skin. Check it out, man. Check it out.”

Crystal feigns concentration on the breakfast choices, but we know she’s listening.

“She loved diamonds,” Gordy continues. “Not exactly your thing.”

“Why aren’t they my thing?”

“Maybe they are. Maybe they are.”

What a schmoozer. He pours on, telling her she should have run east to New York City, not California. Had they met in Manhattan, they’d go clubbing. Dancing at Club 54. Bunch of puke.

Crystal sifts through this information hesitantly, like finding a box of treasures at a flea market. She’s suspicious of its value, yet secretly hoarding the tidbits that serves her best.

“Hepburn is a square,” she says, appearing not in the mood for flattery.

This is a topic I enjoy. Something I know about. I make a point to stay in the conversation. “Hepburn wasn’t right for that part. In the book, Holly was way way naughtier.”

“So you’re saying I’m naughty?” Crystal shoots a look at me, irritated.

“No...I’m just...I’m telling you about the character in the book. I didn’t say...” I have to stop as the story comes back to me: young greedy nymphet from the boonies seeks fame and fortune.

“That’s who you are, my love,” Gordy croons. He kisses his finger tips and blows it to her. “Holly Golightly.”

For a brief second he darts his eyes in my direction, long enough to dare me to deny Crystal these dishonest compliments. He’s managed to put me in cahoots with him. Manipulative bastard.

Crystal tosses a look toward the ceiling and slaps her menu on the table. “I’m going to the

ladies room,” she says, sliding away.

I want to go, too. Don’t leave me alone with this guy. I can feel the plea written across my face, so I lower my eyebrows and take a deep breath in preparation for my own one-on-one with Mr. Coldblood. Looking at my nails, picking at a cuticle, I speak. “You’re going to pay her, right? You’re going to pay her *something*.”

He fabricates a big yawn which slackens his shoulders. He’s looking at me down his thin nose.

“I never should’ve made the offer. She just, I don’t know, laid there. Didn’t move or, or even help. A blow-up doll would’ve been more responsive.”

What am I supposed to say? Defend my friend’s sexual prowess and bed manners? Do I want to suggest it’s his fault? He wasn’t pushing the right buttons?

“You made the deal, Gordy. You know she’s not a ... a ... pro. You’ve gotta pay her.”

A plump Latino waitress arrives at the table with three coffee mugs and starts to pour. We clam up until she’s gone. Gordy winces as he takes a long suck off his cigarette, holding the smoke inside his peaky face and bloodshot brown eyes. A wolf. He looks like the Big Bad Wolf. “Yeah, well...” He sighs out a white cloud right at me. “Where you heading after this?”

I’m fanning the air with my hands like crazy. “Like I’m going to tell you.”

Crystal returns, we focus on the menus. Nobody says nothing, til we place our orders.

“Now I gotta take a piss,” Gordy says, sliding away.

“Crystal. We gotta talk. While Gordy’s gone. While we have the chance.” We look over our shoulders. “The man is such a ... where do I begin? An asshole con. A dirty filthy pirate.”

Crystal shrugs her shoulders, downplaying like a kid who’s been beaten in the schoolyard.

“Just tell me he didn’t hurt you.”

“Hurt me? Naw. He was thrilled with me. Couldn’t get enough.” She forms a plastic smile. “I really surprised him.” Leaning on her elbows, she dangles a spoon over her steaming

coffee, and stares into it, hypnotized by the pendulum.

I'm waiting for our eyes to meet, for a brief confirmation of understanding. She won't look at me.

"You don't have to talk about it. I just want to know you're okay." I slide a little bowl of sugar packets toward her and she picks out two.

She sighs. Thinking. "You know how you get lost in the sex thing...like you're high...like when you're all turned on and nothing else matters?" she asks.

My turn to sigh. "I wish."

Her shoulders slump and she turns toward me, connects with me again, and I see a glimmer of tears in her beautiful brown eyes. "Well, last night, I just wanted it to be over."

She rips the ends off the sugar packets, both at once. Granules spill out onto the table. Gritty. Her hands are shaking.

"Not that I didn't give him his money's worth. The creep. Like making love to a sour bar rag." Resting her elbows on the table-top, she covers her eyes with the palms of her hands. "Tell me to shut up. I don't want it etched in my brain." She jerks her hands away from her face. She inhales, exhales, deeply, through her nose.

"Never mind," I say, leaning my shoulder into hers. "It's over."

"To hell with it. I was in total control. And he loved it. I mean, that's what he was buying." She stirs her coffee hypnotically, making that whirling song. "Still. I don't know how prostitutes do it." Ting, ting. She taps the spoon on the edge of her cup, and sets it on a napkin. A brown stain radiates from it like an unholy aura.

The word "prostitute" frightens me. Once, in Home-Economics class, some girl passed Crystal a little folded piece of paper. A one word note: "SLUT." Crystal crumpled it, popped it in her mouth, chewed and swallowed. I didn't write it. It wasn't me. But that's the look she's giving me now. Like she just reopened the note and recognized my handwriting. I take a sip of coffee and focus ahead, at a pucker in the green vinyl upholstery where a button is missing.

"If I don't get the money, well, that would be even worse than the sexual stuff. On top of

it all, I'll have been taken. Been had."

I can't help but face her. I feel my entire body grimace. Is she serious? That's worse?

She sips her coffee and reaches for more sugar. "I can't get this frickin' coffee sweet enough." She straightens herself. "Not that I am one, you know. Not that I'm not a prostitute or anything."

"Of course not." I hope I sound convincing. I've got to shut myself up. I want to tell her I'm sorry I let her do it. But I'm afraid I'll only emphasize how I regret it ever happened, and how humiliated I am for her.

She picks up the napkin, dabs her nose and swipes the sugar granules off the table. "Once he pays me, we'll celebrate. My treat. Stay in a real hotel. Room service. Sleep like babies."

The waitress places our breakfasts in front of us and one across the table for Gordy. I check the time again.

"Gordy better hurry up," Crystal says, speckling her eggs with pepper. "His waffles are going to get cold."

Our eyes locked for a split second. We both slide out of the booth as fast as we can. Crystal runs for the front door and I head back towards the kitchen and the restrooms. The dark hallway is lined with baby booster chairs and cardboard boxes. At the end, a red exit sign glows ominously above a scuffed white door. I shove the door open and lunge outside. The odor of stale restaurant exhaust catches me up. My eyes squint against the blinding sunlight reflecting off the stark alley walls. I look left and right. There is no one in sight except a guy wearing a stained apron, and pulling bags of garbage toward a rusty dumpster.

"Did someone just come out this door?"

He turns toward the sound of my voice. He's sweaty and wipes his forehead on his sleeve.

"A man?" I prompt.

His slow smile embarrasses me.

THE END