



SPEAK

PLATINUM EDITION

THE OUTSIDERS

S. E. HINTON

Dear Reader,

It is very difficult for me to write about myself, and especially *The Outsiders*, which was written at a horrendous time in my life, was published by a series of mind-boggling synchronicities, and has gone further than any author dared dream. But I'll give it a shot.

I wrote *The Outsiders* when I was sixteen years old. Actually I began it when I was fifteen, as a short story about a boy who was beaten up on his way home from the movies.

But I didn't just write *The Outsiders*, I lived it. Looking back, I realize how important it was to me to have another life at that time. To be someone else. To deal with problems I had to face, and write my way to some sort of understanding and coping. This is all in hindsight. At the time, I was mad about the social situation in my high school. I desperately wanted something to read that dealt realistically with teen-age life.

I knew I was going to be a writer. I love to write. I began in grade school, because I loved to read, and liked the idea of making stories happen the way I wanted them to. By the time I was in high school I had been practicing for years. So I was both elated and not surprised when I received my publishing contract on the day I graduated from high school.

The Outsiders has taken me many places I never dreamed of going. It introduced me to people I would never otherwise have met. Although the names Patrick Swayze, Tom Cruise, Matt Dillon, Rob Lowe, C. Thomas Howell, Emilio Estevez, and Ralph Macchio are familiar to most people, and conjure visions of movie stars and glamour, I remember a group of sweet, goofy, incredibly talented and at the same time incredibly normal teen-age boys. I was involved in every aspect of filming the movie version of *The Outsiders*, and the memory I cherish most is of hanging out with "my boys."

I owe Francis Coppola a debt of thanks. Not only for the respect, kindness, and friendship I personally received from him, but for the fact that he made the movie for the fans of the book. He shot a faithful adaptation, consulting me for everything from locations to wardrobe, but it was the fans of the book he wanted to please. And as far as I know, he is the only director to go back and assemble a more complete movie (*The Outsiders, The Complete Novel DVD*) because those fans asked him to.

Fans. I receive letters from every state, from dozens of foreign countries. From twelve-year-olds and forty-year-olds. From convicts and policemen, teachers, social workers, and of course, kids. Kids who are living lives like those in *The Outsiders*. Kids who can't imagine living lives like those in *The Outsiders*. Kids who read all the time. Ones who never before finished a book.

The letters saying "I loved the book" are good, the ones that say "I never liked to read before, and now I read all the time" are better, but the ones that say "*The Outsiders* changed my life" and "I read it fifteen years ago and I realize how much it has influenced my life choices" frankly scare me. Who am I to change anyone's life? I guess the best reply is "It's the book, not the author" and "It's the message, not the messenger." A lot of the time I feel that *The Outsiders* was meant to be written, and I was chosen to write it. It's certainly done more good than anything I could accomplish on a personal level.

If this sounds like I am overwhelmed by the decades of incredible response to what began as a short story I started when I was fifteen years old, well, I guess that's the truth.

Stay Gold.

S. E. Hinton

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speak

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Chapter 1

WHEN I STEPPED out into the bright sunlight from the darkness of the movie house, I had only two things on my mind: Paul Newman and a ride home. I was wishing I looked like Paul Newman—he looks tough and I don’t—but I guess my own looks aren’t so bad. I have light-brown, almost-red hair and greenish-gray eyes. I wish they were more gray, because I hate most guys that have green eyes, but I have to be content with what I have. My hair is longer than a lot of boys wear theirs, squared off in back and long at the front and sides, but I am a greaser and most of my neighborhood rarely bothers to get a haircut. Besides, I look better with long hair.

I had a long walk home and no company, but I usually lone it anyway, for no reason except that I like to watch

movies undisturbed so I can get into them and live them with the actors. When I see a movie with someone it's kind of uncomfortable, like having someone read your book over your shoulder. I'm different that way. I mean, my second-oldest brother, Soda, who is sixteen-going-on-seventeen, never cracks a book at all, and my oldest brother, Darrel, who we call Darry, works too long and hard to be interested in a story or drawing a picture, so I'm not like them. And nobody in our gang digs movies and books the way I do. For a while there, I thought I was the only person in the world that did. So I loned it.

Soda tries to understand, at least, which is more than Darry does. But then, Soda is different from anybody; he understands everything, almost. Like he's never hollering at me all the time the way Darry is, or treating me as if I was six instead of fourteen. I love Soda more than I've ever loved anyone, even Mom and Dad. He's always happy-go-lucky and grinning, while Darry's hard and firm and rarely grins at all. But then, Darry's gone through a lot in his twenty years, grown up too fast. Sodapop'll never grow up at all. I don't know which way's the best. I'll find out one of these days.

Anyway, I went on walking home, thinking about the movie, and then suddenly wishing I had some company. Greasers can't walk alone too much or they'll get jumped, or someone will come by and scream "Greaser!" at them, which doesn't make you feel too hot, if you know what I mean. We get jumped by the Socs. I'm not sure how you spell it, but it's the abbreviation for the Socials, the jet set, the West-side rich kids. It's like the term "greaser," which is used to class all us boys on the East Side.

We're poorer than the Socs and the middle class. I reckon we're wilder, too. Not like the Socs, who jump greasers and wreck houses and throw beer blasts for kicks, and get editorials in the paper for being a public disgrace one day and an asset to society the next. Greasers are almost like hoods; we steal things and drive old souped-up cars and hold up gas stations and have a gang fight once in a while. I don't mean I do things like that. Darry would kill me if I got into trouble with the police. Since Mom and Dad were killed in an auto wreck, the three of us get to stay together only as long as we behave. So Soda and I stay out of trouble as much as we can, and we're careful not to get caught when we can't. I only mean that most greasers do things like that, just like we wear our hair long and dress in blue jeans and T-shirts, or leave our shirttails out and wear leather jackets and tennis shoes or boots. I'm not saying that either Socs or greasers are better; that's just the way things are.

I could have waited to go to the movies until Darry or Sodapop got off work. They would have gone with me, or driven me there, or walked along, although Soda just can't sit still long enough to enjoy a movie and they bore Darry to death. Darry thinks his life is enough without inspecting other people's. Or I could have gotten one of the gang to come along, one of the four boys Darry and Soda and I have grown up with and consider family. We're almost as close as brothers; when you grow up in a tight-knit neighborhood like ours you get to know each other real well. If I had thought about it, I could have called Darry and he would have come by on his way home and picked me up, or Two-Bit Mathews—one of our gang—would have come

to get me in his car if I had asked him, but sometimes I just don't use my head. It drives my brother Darry nuts when I do stuff like that, 'cause I'm supposed to be smart; I make good grades and have a high IQ and everything, but I don't use my head. Besides, I like walking.

I about decided I didn't like it so much, though, when I spotted that red Corvair trailing me. I was almost two blocks from home then, so I started walking a little faster. I had never been jumped, but I had seen Johnny after four Socs got hold of him, and it wasn't pretty. Johnny was scared of his own shadow after that. Johnny was sixteen then.

I knew it wasn't any use though—the fast walking, I mean—even before the Corvair pulled up beside me and five Socs got out. I got pretty scared—I'm kind of small for fourteen even though I have a good build, and those guys were bigger than me. I automatically hitched my thumbs in my jeans and slouched, wondering if I could get away if I made a break for it. I remembered Johnny—his face all cut up and bruised, and I remembered how he had cried when we found him, half-conscious, in the corner lot. Johnny had it awful rough at home—it took a lot to make him cry.

I was sweating something fierce, although I was cold. I could feel my palms getting clammy and the perspiration running down my back. I get like that when I'm real scared. I glanced around for a pop bottle or a stick or something—Steve Randle, Soda's best buddy, had once held off four guys with a busted pop bottle—but there was nothing. So I stood there like a bump on a log while they surrounded me. I don't use my head. They walked around slowly, silently, smiling.

"Hey, grease," one said in an over-friendly voice. "We're gonna do you a favor, greaser. We're gonna cut all that long greasy hair off."

He had on a madras shirt. I can still see it. Blue madras. One of them laughed, then cussed me out in a low voice. I couldn't think of anything to say. There just isn't a whole lot you can say while waiting to get mugged, so I kept my mouth shut.

"Need a haircut, greaser?" The medium-sized blond pulled a knife out of his back pocket and flipped the blade open.

I finally thought of something to say. "No." I was backing up, away from that knife. Of course I backed right into one of them. They had me down in a second. They had my arms and legs pinned down and one of them was sitting on my chest with his knees on my elbows, and if you don't think that hurts, you're crazy. I could smell English Leather shaving lotion and stale tobacco, and I wondered foolishly if I would suffocate before they did anything. I was scared so bad I was wishing I would. I fought to get loose, and almost did for a second; then they tightened up on me and the one on my chest slugged me a couple of times. So I lay still, swearing at them between gasps. A blade was held against my throat.

"How'd you like that haircut to begin just below the chin?"

It occurred to me then that they could kill me. I went wild. I started screaming for Soda, Darry, anyone. Someone put his hand over my mouth, and I bit it as hard as I could, tasting the blood running through my teeth. I heard a muttered curse and got slugged again, and they were

stuffing a handkerchief in my mouth. One of them kept saying, "Shut him up, for Pete's sake, shut him up!"

Then there were shouts and the pounding of feet, and the Socs jumped up and left me lying there, gasping. I lay there and wondered what in the world was happening—people were jumping over me and running by me and I was too dazed to figure it out. Then someone had me under the armpits and was hauling me to my feet. It was Darry.

"Are you all right, Ponyboy?"

He was shaking me and I wished he'd stop. I was dizzy enough anyway. I could tell it was Darry though—partly because of the voice and partly because Darry's always rough with me without meaning to be.

"I'm okay. Quit shaking me, Darry, I'm okay."

He stopped instantly. "I'm sorry."

He wasn't really. Darry isn't ever sorry for anything he does. It seems funny to me that he should look just exactly like my father and act exactly the opposite from him. My father was only forty when he died and he looked twenty-five and a lot of people thought Darry and Dad were brothers instead of father and son. But they only looked alike—my father was never rough with anyone without meaning to be.

Darry is six-feet-two, and broad-shouldered and muscular. He has dark-brown hair that kicks out in front and a slight cowlick in the back—just like Dad's—but Darry's eyes are his own. He's got eyes that are like two pieces of pale blue-green ice. They've got a determined set to them, like the rest of him. He looks older than twenty—tough, cool, and smart. He would be real handsome if his eyes

weren't so cold. He doesn't understand anything that is not plain hard fact. But he uses his head.

I sat down again, rubbing my cheek where I'd been slugged the most.

Darry jammed his fists in his pockets. "They didn't hurt you too bad, did they?"

They did. I was smarting and aching and my chest was sore and I was so nervous my hands were shaking and I wanted to start bawling, but you just don't say that to Darry.

"I'm okay."

Sodapop came loping back. By then I had figured that all the noise I had heard was the gang coming to rescue me. He dropped down beside me, examining my head.

"You got cut up a little, huh, Ponyboy?"

I only looked at him blankly. "I did?"

He pulled out a handkerchief, wet the end of it with his tongue, and pressed it gently against the side of my head. "You're bleedin' like a stuck pig."

"I am?"

"Look!" He showed me the handkerchief, reddened as if by magic. "Did they pull a blade on you?"

I remembered the voice: "Need a haircut, greaser?" The blade must have slipped while he was trying to shut me up. "Yeah."

Soda is handsomer than anyone else I know. Not like Darry—Soda's movie-star kind of handsome, the kind that people stop on the street to watch go by. He's not as tall as Darry, and he's a little slimmer, but he has a finely drawn, sensitive face that somehow manages to be reckless and thoughtful at the same time. He's got dark-gold hair that

he combs back—long and silky and straight—and in the summer the sun bleaches it to a shining wheat-gold. His eyes are dark brown—lively, dancing, recklessly laughing eyes that can be gentle and sympathetic one moment and blazing with anger the next. He has Dad's eyes, but Soda is one of a kind. He can get drunk in a drag race or dancing without ever getting near alcohol. In our neighborhood it's rare to find a kid who doesn't drink once in a while. But Soda never touches a drop—he doesn't need to. He gets drunk on just plain living. And he understands everybody.

He looked at me more closely. I looked away hurriedly, because, if you want to know the truth, I was starting to bawl. I knew I was as white as I felt and I was shaking like a leaf.

Soda just put his hand on my shoulder. "Easy, Ponyboy. They ain't gonna hurt you no more."

"I know," I said, but the ground began to blur and I felt hot tears running down my cheeks. I brushed them away impatiently. "I'm just a little spooked, that's all." I drew a quivering breath and quit crying. You just don't cry in front of Darry. Not unless you're hurt like Johnny had been that day we found him in the vacant lot. Compared to Johnny I wasn't hurt at all.

Soda rubbed my hair. "You're an okay kid, Pony."

I had to grin at him—Soda can make you grin no matter what. I guess it's because he's always grinning so much himself. "You're crazy, Soda, out of your mind."

Darry looked as if he'd like to knock our heads together. "You're both nuts."

Soda merely cocked one eyebrow, a trick he'd picked up from Two-Bit. "It seems to run in this family."

Darry stared at him for a second, then cracked a grin. Sodapop isn't afraid of him like everyone else and enjoys teasing him. I'd just as soon tease a full-grown grizzly; but for some reason, Darry seems to like being teased by Soda.

Our gang had chased the Socs to their car and heaved rocks at them. They came running toward us now—four lean, hard guys. They were all as tough as nails and looked it. I had grown up with them, and they accepted me, even though I was younger, because I was Darry and Soda's kid brother and I kept my mouth shut good.

Steve Randle was seventeen, tall and lean, with thick greasy hair he kept combed in complicated swirls. He was cocky, smart, and Soda's best buddy since grade school. Steve's specialty was cars. He could lift a hubcap quicker and more quietly than anyone in the neighborhood, but he also knew cars upside-down and backward, and he could drive anything on wheels. He and Soda worked at the same gas station—Steve part time and Soda full time—and their station got more customers than any other in town. Whether that was because Steve was so good with cars or because Soda attracted girls like honey draws flies, I couldn't tell you. I liked Steve only because he was Soda's best friend. He didn't like me—he thought I was a tag-along and a kid; Soda always took me with them when they went places if they weren't taking girls, and that bugged Steve. It wasn't my fault; Soda always asked me, I didn't ask him. Soda doesn't think I'm a kid.

Two-Bit Mathews was the oldest of the gang and the wisecracker of the bunch. He was about six feet tall, stocky in build, and very proud of his long rusty-colored sideburns. He had gray eyes and a wide grin, and he couldn't

stop making funny remarks to save his life. You couldn't shut up that guy; he always had to get his two-bits worth in. Hence his name. Even his teachers forgot his real name was Keith, and we hardly remembered he had one. Life was one big joke to Two-Bit. He was famous for shoplifting and his black-handled switchblade (which he couldn't have acquired without his first talent), and he was always smarting off to the cops. He really couldn't help it. Everything he said was so irresistibly funny that he just had to let the police in on it to brighten up their dull lives. (That's the way he explained it to me.) He liked fights, blondes, and for some unfathomable reason, school. He was still a junior at eighteen and a half and he never learned anything. He just went for kicks. I liked him real well because he kept us laughing at ourselves as well as at other things. He reminded me of Will Rogers—maybe it was the grin.

If I had to pick the real character of the gang, it would be Dallas Winston—Dally. I used to like to draw his picture when he was in a dangerous mood, for then I could get his personality down in a few lines. He had an elfish face, with high cheekbones and a pointed chin, small, sharp animal teeth, and ears like a lynx. His hair was almost white it was so blond, and he didn't like haircuts, or hair oil either, so it fell over his forehead in wisps and kicked out in the back in tufts and curled behind his ears and along the nape of his neck. His eyes were blue, blazing ice, cold with a hatred of the whole world. Dally had spent three years on the wild side of New York and had been arrested at the age of ten. He was tougher than the rest of us—tougher, colder, meaner. The shade of differ-

ence that separates a greaser from a hood wasn't present in Dally. He was as wild as the boys in the downtown outfits, like Tim Shepard's gang.

In New York, Dally blew off steam in gang fights, but here, organized gangs are rarities—there are just small bunches of friends who stick together, and the warfare is between the social classes. A rumble, when it's called, is usually born of a grudge fight, and the opponents just happen to bring their friends along. Oh, there are a few named gangs around, like the River Kings and the Tiber Street Tigers, but here in the Southwest there's no gang rivalry. So Dally, even though he could get into a good fight sometimes, had no specific thing to hate. No rival gang. Only Socs. And you can't win against them no matter how hard you try, because they've got all the breaks and even whipping them isn't going to change that fact. Maybe that was why Dallas was so bitter.

He had quite a reputation. They have a file on him down at the police station. He had been arrested, he got drunk, he rode in rodeos, lied, cheated, stole, rolled drunks, jumped small kids—he did everything. I didn't like him, but he was smart and you had to respect him.

Johnny Cade was last and least. If you can picture a little dark puppy that has been kicked too many times and is lost in a crowd of strangers, you'll have Johnny. He was the youngest, next to me, smaller than the rest, with a slight build. He had big black eyes in a dark tanned face; his hair was jet-black and heavily greased and combed to the side, but it was so long that it fell in shaggy bangs across his forehead. He had a nervous, suspicious look in his eyes, and

that beating he got from the Socs didn't help matters. He was the gang's pet, everyone's kid brother. His father was always beating him up, and his mother ignored him, except when she was hacked off at something, and then you could hear her yelling at him clear down at our house. I think he hated that worse than getting whipped. He would have run away a million times if we hadn't been there. If it hadn't been for the gang, Johnny would never have known what love and affection are.

I wiped my eyes hurriedly. "Didya catch 'em?"

"Nup. They got away this time, the dirty . . ." Two-Bit went on cheerfully, calling the Socs every name he could think of or make up.

"The kid's okay?"

"I'm okay." I tried to think of something to say. I'm usually pretty quiet around people, even the gang. I changed the subject. "I didn't know you were out of the cooler yet, Dally."

"Good behavior. Got off early." Dallas lit a cigarette and handed it to Johnny. Everyone sat down to have a smoke and relax. A smoke always lessens the tension. I had quit trembling and my color was back. The cigarette was calming me down. Two-Bit cocked an eyebrow. "Nice-lookin' bruise you got there, kid."

I touched my cheek gingerly. "Really?"

Two-Bit nodded sagely. "Nice cut, too. Makes you look tough."

Tough and *tuff* are two different words. *Tough* is the same as rough; *tuff* means cool, sharp—like a tuff-looking Mustang or a tuff record. In our neighborhood both are compliments.

Steve flicked his ashes at me. "What were you doin', walkin' by your lonesome?" Leave it to good old Steve to bring up something like that.

"I was comin' home from the movies. I didn't think . . ."

"You don't ever think," Darry broke in, "not at home or anywhere when it counts. You must think at school, with all those good grades you bring home, and you've always got your nose in a book, but do you ever use your head for common sense? No sirree, bub. And if you did have to go by yourself, you should have carried a blade."

I just stared at the hole in the toe of my tennis shoe. Me and Darry just didn't dig each other. I never could please him. He would have hollered at me for carrying a blade if I *had* carried one. If I brought home B's, he wanted A's, and if I got A's, he wanted to make sure they stayed A's. If I was playing football, I should be in studying, and if I was reading, I should be out playing football. He never hollered at Sodapop—not even when Soda dropped out of school or got tickets for speeding. He just hollered at me.

Soda was glaring at him. "Leave my kid brother alone, you hear? It ain't his fault he likes to go to the movies, and it ain't his fault the Socs like to jump us, and if he had been carrying a blade it would have been a good excuse to cut him to ribbons."

Soda always takes up for me.

Darry said impatiently, "When I want my kid brother to tell me what to do with my other kid brother, I'll ask you—kid brother." But he laid off me. He always does when Sodapop tells him to. Most of the time.

"Next time get one of us to go with you, Ponyboy," Two-Bit said. "Any of us will."

“Speakin’ of movies” — Dally yawned, flipping away his cigarette butt — “I’m walkin’ over to the Nightly Double tomorrow night. Anybody want to come and hunt some action?”

Steve shook his head. “Me and Soda are pickin’ up Evie and Sandy for the game.”

He didn’t need to look at me the way he did right then. I wasn’t going to ask if I could come. I’d never tell Soda, because he really likes Steve a lot, but sometimes I can’t stand Steve Randle. I mean it. Sometimes I hate him.

Darry sighed, just like I knew he would. Darry never had time to do anything anymore. “I’m working tomorrow night.”

Dally looked at the rest of us. “How about y’all? Two-Bit? Johnnycake, you and Pony wanta come?”

“Me and Johnny’ll come,” I said. I knew Johnny wouldn’t open his mouth unless he was forced to. “Okay, Darry?”

“Yeah, since it ain’t a school night.” Darry was real good about letting me go places on the weekends. On school nights I could hardly leave the house.

“I was plannin’ on getting boozed up tomorrow night,” Two-Bit said. “If I don’t, I’ll walk over and find y’all.”

Steve was looking at Dally’s hand. His ring, which he had rolled a drunk senior to get, was back on his finger. “You break up with Sylvia again?”

“Yeah, and this time it’s for good. That little broad was two-timin’ me again while I was in jail.”

I thought of Sylvia and Evie and Sandy and Two-Bit’s many blondes. They were the only kind of girls that would look at us, I thought. Tough, loud girls who wore too much eye makeup and giggled and swore too much. I liked

Soda's girl Sandy just fine, though. Her hair was natural blond and her laugh was soft, like her china-blue eyes. She didn't have a real good home or anything and was our kind—greaser—but she was a real nice girl. Still, lots of times I wondered what other girls were like. The girls who were bright-eyed and had their dresses a decent length and acted as if they'd like to spit on us if given a chance. Some were afraid of us, and remembering Dallas Winston, I didn't blame them. But most looked at us like we were dirt—gave us the same kind of look that the Socs did when they came by in their Mustangs and Corvairs and yelled "Grease!" at us. I wondered about them. The girls, I mean . . . Did they cry when their boys were arrested, like Evie did when Steve got hauled in, or did they run out on them the way Sylvia did Dallas? But maybe their boys didn't get arrested or beaten up or busted up in rodeos.

I was still thinking about it while I was doing my homework that night. I had to read *Great Expectations* for English, and that kid Pip, he reminded me of us—the way he felt marked lousy because he wasn't a gentleman or anything, and the way that girl kept looking down on him. That happened to me once. One time in biology I had to dissect a worm, and the razor wouldn't cut, so I used my switchblade. The minute I flicked it out—I forgot what I was doing or I would never have done it—this girl right beside me kind of gasped, and said, "They are right. You are a hood." That didn't make me feel so hot. There were a lot of Socs in that class—I get put into A classes because I'm supposed to be smart—and most of them thought it was pretty funny. I didn't, though. She was a cute girl. She looked real good in yellow.

We deserve a lot of our trouble, I thought. Dallas deserves everything he gets, and should get worse, if you want the truth. And Two-Bit—he doesn't really want or need half the things he swipes from stores. He just thinks it's fun to swipe everything that isn't nailed down. I can understand why Sodapop and Steve get into drag races and fights so much, though—both of them have too much energy, too much feeling, with no way to blow it off.

"Rub harder, Soda," I heard Darry mumbling. "You're gonna put me to sleep."

I looked through the door. Sodapop was giving Darry a back-rub. Darry is always pulling muscles; he roofs houses and he's always trying to carry two bundles of roofing up the ladder. I knew Soda would put him to sleep, because Soda can put about anyone out when he sets his head to it. He thought Darry worked too hard anyway. I did, too.

Darry didn't deserve to work like an old man when he was only twenty. He had been a real popular guy in school; he was captain of the football team and he had been voted Boy of the Year. But we just didn't have the money for him to go to college, even with the athletic scholarship he won. And now he didn't have time between jobs to even think about college. So he never went anywhere and never did anything anymore, except work out at gyms and go skiing with some old friends of his sometimes.

I rubbed my cheek where it had turned purple. I had looked in the mirror, and it did make me look tough. But Darry had made me put a Band-Aid on the cut.

I remembered how awful Johnny had looked when he got beaten up. I had just as much right to use the streets as the Socs did, and Johnny had never hurt them. Why did

the Socs hate us so much? We left them alone. I nearly went to sleep over my homework trying to figure it out.

Sodapop, who had jumped into bed by this time, yelled sleepily for me to turn off the light and get to bed. When I finished the chapter I was on, I did.

Lying beside Soda, staring at the wall, I kept remembering the faces of the Socs as they surrounded me, that blue madras shirt the blond was wearing, and I could still hear a thick voice: "Need a haircut, greaser?" I shivered.

"You cold, Ponyboy?"

"A little," I lied. Soda threw one arm across my neck. He mumbled something drowsily. "Listen, kiddo, when Darry hollers at you . . . he don't mean nothin'. He's just got more worries than somebody his age ought to. Don't take him serious . . . you dig, Pony? Don't let him bug you. He's really proud of you 'cause you're so brainy. It's just because you're the baby—I mean, he loves you a lot. Savvy?"

"Sure," I said, trying for Soda's sake to keep the sarcasm out of my voice.

"Soda?"

"Yeah?"

"How come you dropped out?" I never have gotten over that. I could hardly stand it when he left school.

"'Cause I'm dumb. The only things I was passing anyway were auto mechanics and gym."

"You're not dumb."

"Yeah, I am. Shut up and I'll tell you something. Don't tell Darry, though."

"Okay."

"I think I'm gonna marry Sandy. After she gets out of

school and I get a better job and everything. I might wait till you get out of school, though. So I can still help Darry with the bills and stuff.”

“Tuff enough. Wait till I get out, though, so you can keep Darry off my back.”

“Don’t be like that, kid. I told you he don’t mean half of what he says . . .”

“You in love with Sandy? What’s it like?”

“Hhhmmm.” He sighed happily. “It’s real nice.”

In a moment his breathing was light and regular. I turned my head to look at him and in the moonlight he looked like some Greek god come to earth. I wondered how he could stand being so handsome. Then I sighed. I didn’t quite get what he meant about Darry. Darry thought I was just another mouth to feed and somebody to holler at. Darry love me? I thought of those hard, pale eyes. Soda was wrong for once, I thought. Darry doesn’t love anyone or anything, except maybe Soda. I didn’t hardly think of him as being human. I don’t care, I lied to myself, I don’t care about him either. Soda’s enough, and I’d have him until I got out of school. I don’t care about Darry. But I was still lying and I knew it. I lie to myself all the time. But I never believe me.

Chapter 2

DALLY WAS WAITING for Johnny and me under the street light at the corner of Pickett and Sutton, and since we got there early, we had time to go over to the drugstore in the shopping center and goof around. We bought Cokes and blew the straws at the waitress, and walked around eyeing things that were lying out in the open until the manager got wise to us and suggested we leave. He was too late, though; Dally walked out with two packages of Kools under his jacket.

Then we went across the street and down Sutton a little way to The Dingo. There are lots of drive-ins in town—the Socs go to The Way Out and to Rusty's, and the greasers go to The Dingo and to Jay's. The Dingo is a pretty rough hangout; there's always a fight going on there and once a girl got shot. We walked around talking to all the greasers

and hoods we knew, leaning in car windows or hopping into the back seats, and getting in on who was running away, and who was in jail, and who was going with who, and who could whip who, and who stole what and when and why. We knew about everybody there. There was a pretty good fight while we were there between a big twenty-three-year-old greaser and a Mexican hitchhiker. We left when the switchblades came out, because the cops would be coming soon and nobody in his right mind wants to be around when the fuzz show.

We crossed Sutton and cut around behind Spencer's Special, the discount house, and chased two junior-high kids across a field for a few minutes; by then it was dark enough to sneak in over the back fence of the Nightly Double drive-in movie. It was the biggest in town, and showed two movies every night, and on weekends four—you could say you were going to the Nightly Double and have time to go all over town.

We all had the money to get in—it only costs a quarter if you're not in a car—but Dally hated to do things the legal way. He liked to show that he didn't care whether there was a law or not. He went around *trying* to break laws. We went to the rows of seats in front of the concession stand to sit down. Nobody else was there except two girls who were sitting down front. Dally eyed them coolly, then walked down the aisle and sat right behind them. I had a sick feeling that Dally was up to his usual tricks, and I was right. He started talking, loud enough for the two girls to hear. He started out bad and got worse. Dallas could talk awful dirty if he wanted to and I guess he wanted to then. I felt my ears get hot. Two-Bit or Steve or

even Soda would have gone right along with him, just to see if they could embarrass the girls, but that kind of kicks just doesn't appeal to me. I sat there, struck dumb, and Johnny left hastily to get a Coke.

I wouldn't have felt so embarrassed if they had been greasy girls—I might even have helped old Dallas. But those two girls weren't our kind. They were tuff-looking girls—dressed sharp and really good-looking. They looked about sixteen or seventeen. One had short dark hair, and the other had long red hair. The redhead was getting mad, or scared. She sat up straight and she was chewing hard on her gum. The other one pretended not to hear Dally. Dally was getting impatient. He put his feet up on the back of the redhead's chair, winked at me, and beat his own record for saying something dirty. She turned around and gave him a cool stare.

"Take your feet off my chair and shut your trap."

Boy, she was good-looking. I'd seen her before; she was a cheerleader at our school. I'd always thought she was stuck-up.

Dally merely looked at her and kept his feet where they were. "Who's gonna make me?"

The other one turned around and watched us. "That's the greaser that jockeys for the Slash J sometimes," she said, as if we couldn't hear her.

I had heard the same tone a million times: "Greaser . . . greaser . . . greaser." Oh yeah, I had heard that tone before too many times. What are they doing at a drive-in without a car? I thought, and Dallas said, "I know you two. I've seen you around rodeos."

"It's a shame you can't ride bull half as good as you can

talk it," the redhead said coolly and turned back around.

That didn't bother Dally in the least. "You two barrel race, huh?"

"You'd better leave us alone," the redhead said in a biting voice, "or I'll call the cops."

"Oh, my, my" —Dally looked bored—"you've got me scared to death. You ought to see my record sometime, baby." He grinned slyly. "Guess what I've been in for?"

"*Please* leave us alone," she said. "Why don't you be nice and leave us alone?"

Dally grinned roguishly. "I'm never nice. Want a Coke?"

She was mad by then. "I wouldn't drink it if I was starving in the desert. Get lost, hood!"

Dally merely shrugged and strolled off.

The girl looked at me. I was half-scared of her. I'm half-scared of all nice girls, especially Socs. "Are you going to start in on us?"

I shook my head, wide-eyed. "No."

Suddenly she smiled. Gosh, she was pretty. "You don't look the type. What's your name?"

I wished she hadn't asked me that. I hate to tell people my name for the first time. "Ponyboy Curtis."

Then I waited for the "You're kidding!" or "That's your *real* name?" or one of the other remarks I usually get. Ponyboy's my real name and personally I like it.

The redhead just smiled. "That's an original and lovely name."

"My dad was an original person," I said. "I've got a brother named Sodapop, and it says so on his birth certificate."

"My name's Sherri, but I'm called Cherry because of my hair. Cherry Valance."

"I know," I said. "You're a cheerleader. We go to the same school."

"You don't look old enough to be going to high school," the dark-haired girl said.

"I'm not. I got put up a year in grade school."

Cherry was looking at me. "What's a nice, smart kid like you running around with trash like that for?"

I felt myself stiffen. "I'm a grease, same as Dally. He's my buddy."

"I'm sorry, Ponyboy," she said softly. Then she said briskly, "Your brother Sodapop, does he work at a gasoline station? A DX, I think?"

"Yeah."

"Man, your brother is one doll. I might have guessed you were brothers—you look alike."

I grinned with pride—I don't think I look one bit like Soda, but it's not every day I hear Socs telling me they think my brother is a doll.

"Didn't he used to ride in rodeos? Saddle bronc?"

"Yeah. Dad made him quit after he tore a ligament, though. We still hang around rodeos a lot. I've seen you two barrel race. You're good."

"Thanks," Cherry said, and the other girl, who was named Marcia, said, "How come we don't see your brother at school? He's not any older than sixteen or seventeen, is he?"

I winced inside. I've told you I can't stand it that Soda dropped out. "He's a dropout," I said roughly. "Dropout" made me think of some poor dumb-looking hoodlum wandering the streets breaking out street lights—it didn't fit my happy-go-lucky brother at all. It fitted Dally perfectly, but you could hardly say it about Soda.

Johnny came back then and sat down beside me. He looked around for Dally, then managed a shy "Hi" to the girls and tried to watch the movie. He was nervous, though. Johnny was always nervous around strangers. Cherry looked at him, sizing him up as she had me. Then she smiled softly, and I knew she had him sized up right.

Dally came striding back with an armful of Cokes. He handed one to each of the girls and sat down beside Cherry. "This might cool you off."

She gave him an incredulous look; and then she threw her Coke in his face. "That might cool *you* off, greaser. After you wash your mouth and learn to talk and act decent, I might cool off, too."

Dally wiped the Coke off his face with his sleeve and smiled dangerously. If I had been Cherry I would have beat it out of there. I knew that smile.

"Fiery, huh? Well, that's the way I like 'em." He started to put his arm around her, but Johnny reached over and stopped him.

"Leave her alone, Dally."

"Huh?" Dally was taken off guard. He stared at Johnny in disbelief. Johnny couldn't say "Boo" to a goose. Johnny gulped and got a little pale, but he said, "You heard me. Leave her alone."

Dallas scowled for a second. If it had been me, or Two-Bit, or Soda or Steve, or anyone but Johnny, Dally would have flattened him without a moment's hesitation. You just didn't tell Dally Winston what to do. One time, in a dime store, a guy told him to move over at the candy counter. Dally had turned around and belted him so hard it knocked a tooth loose. A complete stranger, too. But

Johnny was the gang's pet, and Dally just couldn't hit him. He was Dally's pet, too. Dally got up and stalked off, his fists jammed in his pockets and a frown on his face. He didn't come back.

Cherry sighed in relief. "Thanks. He had me scared to death."

Johnny managed an admiring grin. "You sure didn't show it. Nobody talks to Dally like that."

She smiled. "From what I saw, you do."

Johnny's ears got red. I was still staring at him. It had taken more than nerve for him to say what he'd said to Dally—Johnny worshiped the ground Dallas walked on, and I had never heard Johnny talk back to anyone, much less his hero.

Marcia grinned at us. She was a little smaller than Cherry. She was cute, but that Cherry Valance was a real looker. "Y'all sit up here with us. You can protect us."

Johnny and I looked at each other. He grinned suddenly, raising his eyebrows so that they disappeared under his bangs. Would we ever have something to tell the boys! his eyes said plainly. We had picked up two girls, and classy ones at that. Not any greasy broads for us, but real Socs. Soda would flip when I told him.

"Okay," I said nonchalantly, "might as well."

I sat between them, and Johnny sat next to Cherry.

"How old are y'all?" Marcia asked.

"Fourteen," I said.

"Sixteen," said Johnny.

"That's funny," Marcia said, "I thought you were both . . ."

"Sixteen," Cherry finished for her.

I was grateful. Johnny looked fourteen and he knew

it and it bugged him something awful.

Johnny grinned. "How come y'all ain't scared of us like you were Dally?"

Cherry sighed. "You two are too sweet to scare anyone. First of all, you didn't join in Dallas's dirty talk, and you made him leave us alone. And when we asked you to sit up here with us, you didn't act like it was an invitation to make out for the night. Besides that, I've heard about Dallas Winston, and he looked as hard as nails and twice as tough. And you two don't look mean."

"Sure," I said tiredly, "we're young and innocent."

"No," Cherry said slowly, looking at me carefully, "not innocent. You've seen too much to be innocent. Just not . . . dirty."

"Dally's okay," Johnny said defensively, and I nodded. You take up for your buddies, no matter what they do. When you're a gang, you stick up for the members. If you don't stick up for them, stick together, make like brothers, it isn't a gang any more. It's a pack. A snarling, distrustful, bickering pack like the Socs in their social clubs or the street gangs in New York or the wolves in the timber. "He's tough, but he's a cool old guy."

"He'd leave you alone if he knew you," I said, and that was true. When Steve's cousin from Kansas came down, Dally was decent to her and watched his swearing. We all did around nice girls who were the cousinly type. I don't know how to explain it—we try to be nice to the girls we see once in a while, like cousins or the girls in class; but we still watch a nice girl go by on a street corner and say all kinds of lousy stuff about her. Don't ask me why. I don't know why.

"Well," Marcia said with finality, "I'm glad he doesn't know us."

"I kind of admire him," Cherry said softly, so only I heard, and then we settled down to watch the movie.

Oh, yeah, we found out why they were without a car. They'd come with their boyfriends, but walked out on them when they found out the boys had brought some booze along. The boys had gotten angry and left.

"I don't care if they did." Cherry sounded annoyed. "It's not my idea of a good time to sit in a drive-in and watch people get drunk."

You could tell by the way she said it that her idea of a good time was probably high-class, and probably expensive. They'd decided to stay and see the movie anyway. It was one of those beach-party movies with no plot and no acting but a lot of girls in bikinis and some swinging songs, so it was all right. We were all four sitting there in silence when suddenly a strong hand came down on Johnny's shoulder and another on mine and a deep voice said, "Okay, greasers, you've had it."

I almost jumped out of my skin. It was like having someone leap out from behind a door and yell "Boo!" at you.

I looked fearfully over my shoulder and there was Two-Bit, grinning like a Chessy cat. "Glory, Two-Bit, scare us to death!" He was good at voice imitations and had sounded for all the world like a snarling Soc. Then I looked at Johnny. His eyes were shut and he was as white as a ghost. His breath was coming in smothered gasps. Two-Bit knew better than to scare Johnny like that. I guess he'd forgotten. He's kind of scatterbrained. Johnny opened his eyes and said weakly, "Hey, Two-Bit."

Two-Bit messed up his hair, "Sorry, kid," he said, "I forgot."

He climbed over the chair and plopped down beside Marcia. "Who's this, your great-aunts?"

"Great-grandmothers, twice removed," Cherry said smoothly.

I couldn't tell if Two-Bit was drunk or not. It's kind of hard to tell with him—he acts boozed up sometimes even when he's sober. He cocked one eyebrow up and the other down, which he always does when something puzzles him, or bothers him, or when he feels like saying something smart. "Shoot, you're ninety-six if you're a day."

"I'm a night," Marcia said brightly.

Two-Bit stared at her admiringly. "Brother, you're a sharp one. Where'd you two ever get to be picked up by a couple of greasy hoods like Pony and Johnny?"

"We really picked them up," Marcia said. "We're really Arabian slave traders and we're thinking about shanghaiing them. They're worth ten camels apiece at least."

"Five," Two-Bit disagreed. "They don't talk Arabian, I don't think. Say somethin' in Arabian, Johnnycake."

"Aw, cut it out!" Johnny broke in. "Dally was bothering them and when he left they wanted us to sit with them to protect them. Against wisecracking greasers like you, probably."

Two-Bit grinned, because Johnny didn't usually get sassy like that. We thought we were doing good if we could get him to talk at all. Incidentally, we don't mind being called greaser by another greaser. It's kind of playful then.

"Hey, where is ol' Dally, anyways?"

"He went hunting some action—booze or dames or a fight. I hope he don't get jailed again. He just got out."

"He'll probably find the fight," Two-Bit stated cheerfully. "That's why I came over. Mr. Timothy Shepard and Co. are looking for whoever so kindly slashed their car's tires, and since Mr. Curly Shepard spotted Dallas doing it . . . well . . . Does Dally have a blade?"

"Not that I know of," I said. "I think he's got a piece of pipe, but he busted his blade this morning."

"Good. Tim'll fight fair if Dally don't pull a blade on him. Dally shouldn't have any trouble."

Cherry and Marcia were staring at us. "You don't believe in playing rough or anything, do you?"

"A fair fight isn't rough," Two-Bit said. "Blades are rough. So are chains and heaters and pool sticks and rumbles. Skin fighting isn't rough. It blows off steam better than anything. There's nothing wrong with throwing a few punches. Socs are rough. They gang up on one or two, or they rumble each other with their social clubs. Us greasers usually stick together, but when we do fight among ourselves, it's a fair fight between two. And Dally deserves whatever he gets, 'cause slashed tires ain't no joke when you've got to work to pay for them. He got spotted, too, and that was his fault. Our one rule, besides Stick together, is Don't get caught. He might get beat up, he might not. Either way there's not going to be any blood feud between our outfit and Shepard's. If we needed them tomorrow they'd show. If Tim beats Dally's head in, and then tomorrow asks us for help in a rumble, we'll show. Dally was getting kicks. He got caught. He pays up. No sweat."

"Yeah, boy," Cherry said sarcastically, "real simple."

"Sure," Marcia said, unconcerned. "If he gets killed or something, you just bury him. No sweat."

"You dig okay, baby." Two-Bit grinned and lit a cigarette. "Anyone want a weed?"

I looked at Two-Bit admiringly. He sure put things into words good. Maybe he was still a junior at eighteen and a half, and maybe his sideburns were too long, and maybe he did get boozed up too much, but he sure understood things.

Cherry and Marcia shook their heads at his offering of cigarettes, but Johnny and I reached for one. Johnny's color was back and his breathing was regular, but his hand was shaking ever so slightly. A cigarette would steady it.

"Ponyboy, will you come with me to get some popcorn?" Cherry asked.

I jumped up. "Sure. Y'all want some?"

"I do," said Marcia. She was finishing the Coke Dally had given her. I realized then that Marcia and Cherry weren't alike. Cherry had said she wouldn't drink Dally's Coke if she was starving, and she meant it. It was the principle of the thing. But Marcia saw no reason to throw away a perfectly good, free Coke.

"Me too," said Two-Bit. He flipped me a fifty-cent piece. "Get Johnny some, too. I'm buyin'," he added as Johnny started to reach into his jeans pocket.

We went to the concession stand and, as usual, there was a line a mile long, so we had to wait. Quite a few kids turned to look at us—you didn't see a kid grease and a Socy cheerleader together often. Cherry didn't seem to notice.

"Your friend—the one with the sideburns—he's okay?"

"He ain't dangerous like Dallas if that's what you mean. He's okay."

She smiled and her eyes showed that her mind was on something else. "Johnny . . . he's been hurt bad sometime, hasn't he?" It was more of a statement than a question. "Hurt and scared."

"It was the Socs," I said nervously, because there were plenty of Socs milling around and some of them were giving me funny looks, as if I shouldn't be with Cherry or something. And I don't like to talk about it either—Johnny getting beat up, I mean. But I started in, talking a little faster than I usually do because I don't like to think about it either.

It was almost four months ago. I had walked down to the DX station to get a bottle of pop and to see Steve and Soda, because they'll always buy me a couple of bottles and let me help work on the cars. I don't like to go on weekends because then there is usually a bunch of girls down there flirting with Soda—all kinds of girls, Socs too. I don't care too much for girls yet. Soda says I'll grow out of it. He did.

It was a warmish spring day with the sun shining bright, but it was getting chilly and dark by the time we started for home. We were walking because we had left Steve's car at the station. At the corner of our block there's a wide, open field where we play football and hang out, and it's often a site for rumbles and fist fights. We were passing it, kicking rocks down the street and finishing our last bottle of Pepsi, when Steve noticed something lying on the ground. He

picked it up. It was Johnny's blue-jeans jacket—the only jacket he had.

“Looks like Johnny forgot his jacket,” Steve said, slinging it over his shoulder to take it by Johnny's house. Suddenly he stopped and examined it more carefully. There was a stain the color of rust across the collar. He looked at the ground. There were some more stains on the grass. He looked up and across the field with a stricken expression on his face. I think we all heard the low moan and saw the dark motionless hump on the other side of the lot at the same time. Soda reached him first. Johnny was lying face down on the ground. Soda turned him over gently, and I nearly got sick. Someone had beaten him badly.

We were used to seeing Johnny banged up—his father clobbered him around a lot, and although it made us madder than heck, we couldn't do anything about it. But those beatings had been nothing like this. Johnny's face was cut up and bruised and swollen, and there was a wide gash from his temple to his cheekbone. He would carry that scar all his life. His white T-shirt was splattered with blood. I just stood there, trembling with sudden cold. I thought he might be dead; surely nobody could be beaten like that and live. Steve closed his eyes for a second and muffled a groan as he dropped on his knees beside Soda.

Somehow the gang sensed what had happened. Two-Bit was suddenly there beside me, and for once his comical grin was gone and his dancing gray eyes were stormy. Darry had seen us from our porch and ran toward us, suddenly skidding to a halt. Dally was there, too, swearing under his breath, and turning away with a sick expression

on his face. I wondered about it vaguely. Dally had seen people killed on the streets of New York's West Side. Why did he look sick now?

"Johnny?" Soda lifted him up and held him against his shoulder. He gave the limp body a slight shake. "Hey, Johnnycake."

Johnny didn't open his eyes, but there came a soft question. "Soda?"

"Yeah, it's me," Sodapop said. "Don't talk. You're gonna be okay."

"There was a whole bunch of them," Johnny went on, swallowing, ignoring Soda's command. "A blue Mustang full . . . I got so scared . . ." He tried to swear, but suddenly started crying, fighting to control himself, then sobbing all the more because he couldn't. I had seen Johnny take a whipping with a two-by-four from his old man and never let out a whimper. That made it worse to see him break now. Soda just held him and pushed Johnny's hair back out of his eyes. "It's okay, Johnnycake, they're gone now. It's okay."

Finally, between sobs, Johnny managed to gasp out his story. He had been hunting our football to practice a few kicks when a blue Mustang had pulled up beside the lot. There were four Socs in it. They had caught him and one of them had a lot of rings on his hand—that's what had cut Johnny up so badly. It wasn't just that they had beaten him half to death—he could take that. They had scared him. They had threatened him with everything under the sun. Johnny was high-strung anyway, a nervous wreck from getting belted every time he turned around and from hearing his parents fight all the time. Living in those conditions

might have turned someone else rebellious and bitter; it was killing Johnny. He had never been a coward. He was a good man in a rumble. He stuck up for the gang and kept his mouth shut good around cops. But after the night of the beating, Johnny was jumpier than ever. I didn't think he'd ever get over it. Johnny never walked by himself after that. And Johnny, who was the most law-abiding of us, now carried in his back pocket a six-inch switchblade. He'd use it, too, if he ever got jumped again. They had scared him that much. He would kill the next person who jumped him. Nobody was ever going to beat him like that again. Not over his dead body . . .

I had nearly forgotten that Cherry was listening to me. But when I came back to reality and looked at her, I was startled to find her as white as a sheet.

"All Socs aren't like that," she said. "You have to believe me, Ponyboy. Not all of us are like that."

"Sure," I said.

"That's like saying all you greasers are like Dallas Winston. I'll bet he's jumped a few people."

I digested that. It was true. Dally had jumped people. He had told us stories about muggings in New York that made the hair on the back of my neck stand up. But not all of us were that bad.

Cherry no longer looked sick, only sad. "I'll bet you think the Socs have it made. The rich kids, the West-side Socs. I'll tell you something, Ponyboy, and it may come as a surprise. We have troubles you've never even heard of. You want to know something?" She looked me straight

in the eye. "Things are rough all over."

"I believe you," I said. "We'd better get back out there with the popcorn or Two-Bit'll think I ran off with his money."

We went back and watched the movie through again. Marcia and Two-Bit were hitting it off fine. Both had the same scatterbrained sense of humor. But Cherry and Johnny and I just sat there, looking at the movie and not talking. I quit worrying about everything and thought about how nice it was to sit with a girl without having to listen to her swear or to beat her off with a club. I knew Johnny liked it, too. He didn't talk to girls much. Once, while Dallas was in reform school, Sylvia had started hanging on to Johnny and sweet-talking him and Steve got hold of her and told her if she tried any of her tricks with Johnny he'd personally beat the tar out of her. Then he gave Johnny a lecture on girls and how a sneaking little broad like Sylvia would get him into a lot of trouble. As a result, Johnny never spoke to girls much, but whether that was because he was scared of Steve or because he was shy, I couldn't tell.

I got the same lecture from Two-Bit after we'd picked up a couple of girls downtown one day. I thought it was funny, because girls are one subject even Darry thinks I use my head about. And it really had been funny, because Two-Bit was half-crocked when he gave me the lecture, and he told me some stories that about made me want to crawl under the floor or something. But he had been talking about girls like Sylvia and the girls he and Dally and the rest picked up at drive-ins and downtown; he never said anything about Socy girls. So I figured it was all right

to be sitting there with them. Even if they did have their own troubles. I really couldn't see what Socs would have to sweat about—good grades, good cars, good girls, madras and Mustangs and Corvairs—Man, I thought, if I had worries like that I'd consider myself lucky.

I know better now.

Chapter 3

AFTER THE MOVIE was over it suddenly came to us that Cherry and Marcia didn't have a way to get home. Two-Bit gallantly offered to walk them home—the west side of town was only about twenty miles away—but they wanted to call their parents and have them come and get them. Two-Bit finally talked them into letting us drive them home in his car. I think they were still half-scared of us. They were getting over it, though, as we walked to Two-Bit's house to pick up the car. It seemed funny to me that Socs—if these girls were any example—were just like us. They liked the Beatles and thought Elvis Presley was out, and we thought the Beatles were rank and that Elvis was tuff, but that seemed the only difference to me. Of course greasy girls would have acted a lot tougher, but there was a basic sameness. I thought

maybe it was money that separated us.

"No," Cherry said slowly when I said this. "It's not just money. Part of it is, but not all. You greasers have a different set of values. You're more emotional. We're sophisticated—cool to the point of not feeling anything. Nothing is real with us. You know, sometimes I'll catch myself talking to a girl-friend, and realize I don't mean half of what I'm saying. I don't really think a beer blast on the river bottom is super-cool, but I'll rave about one to a girl-friend just to be saying something." She smiled at me. "I never told anyone that. I think you're the first person I've ever really gotten through to."

She was coming through to me all right, probably because I was a greaser, and younger; she didn't have to keep her guard up with me.

"Rat race is a perfect name for it," she said. "We're always going and going and going, and never asking where. Did you ever hear of having more than you wanted? So that you couldn't want anything else and then started looking for something else to want? It seems like we're always searching for something to satisfy us, and never finding it. Maybe if we could lose our cool we could."

That was the truth. Socs were always behind a wall of aloofness, careful not to let their real selves show through. I had seen a social-club rumble once. The Socs even fought coldly and practically and impersonally.

"That's why we're separated," I said. "It's not money, it's feeling—you don't feel anything and we feel too violently."

"And"—she was trying to hide a smile—"that's probably why we take turns getting our names in the paper."

Two-Bit and Marcia weren't even listening to us. They

were engaged in some wild conversation that made no sense to anyone but themselves.

I have quite a rep for being quiet, almost as quiet as Johnny. Two-Bit always said he wondered why Johnny and I were such good buddies. "You must make such interestin' conversation," he'd say, cocking one eyebrow, "you keepin' your mouth shut and Johnny not sayin' anything." But Johnny and I understood each other without saying anything. Nobody but Soda could really get me talking. Till I met Cherry Valance.

I don't know why I could talk to her; maybe for the same reason she could talk to me. The first thing I knew I was telling her about Mickey Mouse, Soda's horse. I had never told anyone about Soda's horse. It was personal.

Soda had this buckskin horse, only it wasn't his. It belonged to a guy who kept it at the stables where Soda used to work. Mickey Mouse was Soda's horse, though. The first day Soda saw him he said, "There's my horse," and I never doubted it. I was about ten then. Sodapop is horsecrazy. I mean it. He's always hanging around stables and rodeos, hopping on a horse every time he gets a chance. When I was ten I thought that Mickey Mouse and Soda looked alike and were alike. Mickey Mouse was a dark-gold buckskin, sassy and ornery, not much more than a colt. He'd come when Soda called him. He wouldn't come for anyone else. That horse loved Soda. He'd stand there and chew on Soda's sleeve or collar. Gosh, but Sodapop was crazy about that horse. He went down to see him every day. Mickey Mouse was a mean horse. He kicked other horses and was always getting into trouble. "I've got me a ornery pony," Soda'd tell him, rubbing his

neck. "How come you're so mean, Mickey Mouse?" Mickey Mouse would just chew on his sleeve and sometimes nip him. But not hard. He may have belonged to another guy, but he was Soda's horse.

"Does Soda still have him?" Cherry asked.

"He got sold," I said. "They came and got him one day and took him off. He was a real valuable horse. Pure quarter."

She didn't say anything else and I was glad. I couldn't tell her that Soda had bawled all night long after they came and got Mickey Mouse. I had cried, too, if you want to know the truth, because Soda never really wanted anything except a horse, and he'd lost his. Soda had been twelve then, going-on-thirteen. He never let on to Mom and Dad how he felt, though, because we never had enough money and usually we had a hard time making ends meet. When you're thirteen in our neighborhood you know the score. I kept saving my money for a year, thinking that someday I could buy Mickey Mouse back for Soda. You're not so smart at ten.

"You read a lot, don't you, Ponyboy?" Cherry asked.

I was startled. "Yeah. Why?"

She kind of shrugged. "I could just tell. I'll bet you watch sunsets, too." She was quiet for a minute after I nodded. "I used to watch them, too, before I got so busy . . ."

I pictured that, or tried to. Maybe Cherry stood still and watched the sun set while she was supposed to be taking the garbage out. Stood there and watched and forgot everything else until her big brother screamed at her to hurry up. I shook my head. It seemed funny to me that the sunset she saw from her patio and the one I saw from the back

steps was the same one. Maybe the two different worlds we lived in weren't so different. We saw the same sunset.

Marcia suddenly gasped. "Cherry, look what's coming."

We all looked and saw a blue Mustang coming down the street. Johnny made a small noise in his throat and when I looked at him he was white.

Marcia was shifting nervously. "What are we going to do?"

Cherry bit a fingernail. "Stand here," she said. "There isn't much else we can do."

"Who is it?" Two-Bit asked. "The F.B.I.?"

"No," Cherry said bleakly, "it's Randy and Bob."

"And," Two-Bit added grimly, "a few other of the socially elite checkered-shirt set."

"Your boyfriends?" Johnny's voice was steady, but standing as close to him as I was, I could see he was trembling. I wondered why—Johnny was a nervous wreck, but he never was that jumpy.

Cherry started walking down the street. "Maybe they won't see us. Act normal."

"Who's acting?" Two-Bit grinned. "I'm a natural normal."

"Wish it was the other way around," I muttered, and Two-Bit said, "Don't get mouthy, Ponyboy."

The Mustang passed us slowly and went right on by. Marcia sighed in relief. "That was close."

Cherry turned to me. "Tell me about your oldest brother. You don't talk much about him."

I tried to think of something to say about Darry, and shrugged. "What's to talk about? He's big and handsome and likes to play football."

"I mean, what's he like? I feel like I know Soda from the

way you talk about him; tell me about Darry.” And when I was silent she urged me on. “Is he wild and reckless like Soda? Dreamy, like you?”

My face got hot as I bit my lip. Darry . . . what was Darry like? “He’s . . .” I started to say he was a good ol’ guy but I couldn’t. I burst out bitterly: “He’s not like Sodapop at all and he sure ain’t like me. He’s hard as a rock and about as human. He’s got eyes exactly like frozen ice. He thinks I’m a pain in the neck. He likes Soda—everybody likes Soda—but he can’t stand me. I bet he wishes he could stick me in a home somewhere, and he’d do it, too, if Soda’d let him.”

Two-Bit and Johnny were staring at me now. “No . . .” Two-Bit said, dumfounded. “No, Ponyboy, that ain’t right . . . you got it wrong . . .”

“Gee,” Johnny said softly, “I thought you and Darry and Soda got along real well . . .”

“Well, we don’t,” I snapped, feeling silly. I knew my ears were red by the way they were burning, and I was thankful for the darkness. I felt stupid. Compared to Johnny’s home, mine was heaven. At least Darry didn’t get drunk and beat me up or run me out of the house, and I had Sodapop to talk things over with. That made me mad, I mean making a fool of myself in front of everyone. “An’ you can shut your trap, Johnny Cade, ’cause we all know you ain’t wanted at home, either. And you can’t blame them.”

Johnny’s eyes went round and he winced as though I’d belted him. Two-Bit slapped me a good one across the side of the head, and hard.

“Shut your mouth, kid. If you wasn’t Soda’s kid brother

I'd beat the tar out of you. You know better than to talk to Johnny like that." He put his hand on Johnny's shoulder. "He didn't mean it, Johnny."

"I'm sorry," I said miserably. Johnny was my buddy. "I was just mad."

"It's the truth," Johnny said with a bleak grin. "I don't care."

"Shut up talkin' like that," Two-Bit said fiercely, messing up Johnny's hair. "We couldn't get along without you, so you can just shut up!"

"It ain't fair!" I cried passionately. "It ain't fair that we have all the rough breaks!" I didn't know exactly what I meant, but I was thinking about Johnny's father being a drunk and his mother a selfish slob, and Two-Bit's mother being a barmaid to support him and his kid sister after their father ran out on them, and Dally—wild, cunning Dally—turning into a hoodlum because he'd die if he didn't, and Steve—his hatred for his father coming out in his soft, bitter voice and the violence of his temper. Sodapop . . . a dropout so he could get a job and keep me in school, and Darry, getting old before his time trying to run a family and hold on to two jobs and never having any fun—while the Socs had so much spare time and money that they jumped us and each other for kicks, had beer blasts and river-bottom parties because they didn't know what else to do. Things were rough all over, all right. All over the East Side. It just didn't seem right to me.

"I know," Two-Bit said with a good-natured grin, "the chips are always down when it's our turn, but that's the way things are. Like it or lump it."

Cherry and Marcia didn't say anything. I guess they

didn't know what to say. We had forgotten they were there. Then the blue Mustang was coming down the street again, more slowly.

"Well," Cherry said resignedly, "they've spotted us."

The Mustang came to a halt beside us, and the two boys in the front seat got out. They were Socs all right. One had on a white shirt and a madras ski jacket, and the other a light-yellow shirt and a wine-colored sweater. I looked at their clothes and realized for the first time that evening that all I had was a pair of jeans and Soda's old navy sweat shirt with the sleeves cut short. I swallowed. Two-Bit started to tuck in his shirttail, but stopped himself in time; he just flipped up the collar of his black leather jacket and lit a cigarette. The Socs didn't even seem to see us.

"Cherry, Marcia, listen to us . . ." the handsome black-haired Soc with the dark sweater began.

Johnny was breathing heavily and I noticed he was staring at the Soc's hand. He was wearing three heavy rings. I looked quickly at Johnny, an idea dawning on me. I remembered that it was a blue Mustang that had pulled up beside the vacant lot and that Johnny's face had been cut up by someone wearing rings . . .

The Soc's voice broke into my thoughts: ". . . just because we got a little drunk last time . . ."

Cherry looked mad. "A little? You call reeling and passing out in the streets 'a little'? Bob, I told you, I'm never going out with you while you're drinking, and I mean it. Too many things could happen while you're drunk. It's me or the booze."

The other Soc, a tall guy with a semi-Beatle haircut, turned to Marcia. "Baby, you know we don't get drunk very

often . . .” When she only gave him a cold stare he got angry. “And even if you are mad at us, that’s no reason to go walking the streets with these bums.”

Two-Bit took a long drag on his cigarette, Johnny slouched and hooked his thumbs in his pockets, and I stiffened. We can look meaner than anything when we want to—looking tough comes in handy. Two-Bit put his elbow on Johnny’s shoulder. “Who you callin’ bums?”

“Listen, greasers, we got four more of us in the back seat . . .”

“Then pity the back seat,” Two-Bit said to the sky.

“If you’re looking for a fight . . .”

Two-Bit cocked an eyebrow, but it only made him look more cool. “You mean if I’m looking for a good jumping, you outnumber us, so you’ll give it to us? Well . . .” He snatched up an empty bottle, busted off the end, and gave it to me, then reached in his back pocket and flipped out his switchblade. “Try it, pal.”

“No!” Cherry cried. “Stop it!” She looked at Bob. “We’ll ride home with you. Just wait a minute.”

“Why?” Two-Bit demanded. “We ain’t scared of them.”

Cherry shuddered. “I can’t stand fights . . . I can’t stand them . . .”

I pulled her to one side. “I couldn’t use this,” I said, dropping the pop bottle. “I couldn’t ever cut anyone. . . .” I had to tell her that, because I’d seen her eyes when Two-Bit flicked out his switch.

“I know,” she said quietly, “but we’d better go with them. Ponyboy . . . I mean . . . if I see you in the hall at school or someplace and don’t say hi, well, it’s not personal or anything, but . . .”

"I know," I said.

"We couldn't let our parents see us with you all. You're a nice boy and everything . . ."

"It's okay," I said, wishing I was dead and buried somewhere. Or at least that I had on a decent shirt. "We aren't in the same class. Just don't forget that some of us watch the sunset too."

She looked at me quickly. "I could fall in love with Dallas Winston," she said. "I hope I never see him again, or I will."

She left me standing there with my mouth dropped open, and the blue Mustang vroomed off.

We walked on home, mostly in silence. I wanted to ask Johnny if those were the same Socs that had beaten him up, but I didn't mention it. Johnny never talked about it and we never said anything.

"Well, those were two good-lookin' girls if I ever saw any." Two-Bit yawned as we sat down on the curb at the vacant lot. He took a piece of paper out of his pocket and tore it up.

"What was that?"

"Marcia's number. Probably a phony one, too. I must have been outa my mind to ask for it. I think I'm a little soused."

So he had been drinking. Two-Bit was smart. He knew the score. "Y'all goin' home?" he asked.

"Not right now," I said. I wanted to have another smoke and to watch the stars. I had to be in by twelve, but I thought I had plenty of time.

"I don't know why I handed you that busted bottle,"

Two-Bit said, getting to his feet. "You'd never use it."

"Maybe I would have," I said. "Where you headed?"

"Gonna go play a little snooker and hunt up a poker game. Maybe get rip-roarin' drunk. I dunno. See y'all tomorrow."

Johnny and I stretched out on our backs and looked at the stars. I was freezing—it was a cold night and all I had was that sweat shirt, but I could watch stars in sub-zero weather. I saw Johnny's cigarette glowing in the dark and wondered vaguely what it was like inside a burning ember . . .

"It was because we're greasers," Johnny said, and I knew he was talking about Cherry. "We could have hurt her reputation."

"I reckon," I said, wondering if I ought to tell Johnny what she had said about Dallas.

"Man, that was a tuff car. Mustangs are tuff."

"Big-time Socs, all right," I said, a nervous bitterness growing inside me. It wasn't fair for the Socs to have everything. We were as good as they were; it wasn't our fault we were greasers. I couldn't just take it or leave it, like Two-Bit, or ignore it and love life anyway, like Sodapop, or harden myself beyond caring, like Dally, or actually enjoy it, like Tim Shepard. I felt the tension growing inside of me and I knew something had to happen or I would explode.

"I can't take much more." Johnny spoke my own feelings. "I'll kill myself or something."

"Don't," I said, sitting up in alarm. "You can't kill yourself, Johnny."

"Well, I won't. But I gotta do something. It seems like there's gotta be someplace without greasers or Socs, with just people. Plain ordinary people."

"Out of the big towns," I said, lying back down. "In the country . . ."

In the country . . . I loved the country. I wanted to be out of towns and away from excitement. I only wanted to lie on my back under a tree and read a book or draw a picture, and not worry about being jumped or carrying a blade or ending up married to some scatterbrained broad with no sense. The country would be like that, I thought dreamily. I would have a yeller cur dog, like I used to, and Sodapop could get Mickey Mouse back and ride in all the rodeos he wanted to, and Darry would lose that cold, hard look and be like he used to be, eight months ago, before Mom and Dad were killed. Since I was dreaming I brought Mom and Dad back to life . . . Mom could bake some more chocolate cakes and Dad would drive the pickup out early to feed the cattle. He would slap Darry on the back and tell him he was getting to be a man, a regular chip off the block, and they would be as close as they used to be. Maybe Johnny could come and live with us, and the gang could come out on weekends, and maybe Dallas would see that there was some good in the world after all, and Mom would talk to him and make him grin in spite of himself. "You've got quite a mom," Dally used to say. "She knows the score." She could talk to Dallas and kept him from getting into a lot of trouble. My mother was golden and beautiful . . .

"Ponyboy"—Johnny was shaking me—"Hey, Pony, wake up."

I sat up, shivering. The stars had moved. "Glory, what time is it?"

"I don't know. I went to sleep, too, listening to you rattle on and on. You'd better get home. I think I'll stay all night out here." Johnny's parents didn't care if he came home or not.

"Okay." I yawned. Gosh, but it was cold. "If you get cold or something come on over to our house."

"Okay."

I ran home, trembling at the thought of facing Darry. The porch light was on. Maybe they were asleep and I could sneak in, I thought. I peeked in the window. Sodapop was stretched out on the sofa, sound asleep, but Darry was in the armchair under the lamp, reading the newspaper. I gulped, and opened the door softly. Darry looked up from his paper. He was on his feet in a second. I stood there, chewing on my fingernail.

"Where the heck have you been? Do you know what time it is?" He was madder than I'd seen him in a long time. I shook my head wordlessly.

"Well, it's two in the morning, kiddo. Another hour and I would have had the police out after you. Where were you, Ponyboy?"—his voice was rising—"Where in the almighty universe were you?"

It sounded dumb, even to me, when I stammered, "I . . . I went to sleep in the lot . . ."

"You what?" He was shouting, and Sodapop sat up and rubbed his eyes.

"Hey, Ponyboy," he said sleepily, "where ya been?"

"I didn't mean to." I pleaded with Darry. "I was talking to Johnny and we both dropped off . . ."

"I reckon it never occurred to you that your brothers might be worrying their heads off and afraid to call the police because something like that could get you two thrown in a boys' home so quick it'd make your head spin. And you were asleep in the lot? Ponyboy, what on earth is the matter with you? Can't you use your head? You haven't even got a coat on."

I felt hot tears of anger and frustration rising. "I said I didn't mean to . . ."

"I didn't mean to!" Darry shouted, and I almost shook. "I didn't think! I forgot! That's all I hear out of you! Can't you think of anything?"

"Darry . . ." Sodapop began, but Darry turned on him. "You keep your trap shut! I'm sick and tired of hearin' you stick up for him."

He should never yell at Soda. Nobody should ever holler at my brother. I exploded. "You don't yell at him!" I shouted. Darry wheeled around and slapped me so hard that it knocked me against the door.

Suddenly it was deathly quiet. We had all frozen. Nobody in my family had ever hit me. Nobody. Soda was wide-eyed. Darry looked at the palm of his hand where it had turned red and then looked back at me. His eyes were huge. "Ponyboy . . ."

I turned and ran out the door and down the street as fast as I could. Darry screamed, "Pony, I didn't mean to!" but I was at the lot by then and pretended I couldn't hear. I was running away. It was plain to me that Darry didn't want me around. And I wouldn't stay if he did. He wasn't ever going to hit me again.

"Johnny?" I called, and started when he rolled over and

jumped up almost under my feet. "Come on, Johnny, we're running away."

Johnny asked no questions. We ran for several blocks until we were out of breath. Then we walked. I was crying by then. I finally just sat down on the curb and cried, burying my face in my arms. Johnny sat down beside me, one hand on my shoulder. "Easy, Ponyboy," he said softly, "we'll be okay."

I finally calmed down and wiped my eyes on my bare arm. My breath was coming in quivering sobs. "Gotta cigarette?"

He handed me one and struck a match.

"Johnny, I'm scared."

"Well, don't be. You're scarin' me. What happened? I never seen you bawl like that."

"I don't very often. It was Darry. He hit me. I don't know what happened, but I couldn't take him hollering at me and hitting me too. I don't know . . . sometimes we get along okay, then all of a sudden he blows up on me or else is naggin' at me all the time. He didn't use to be like that . . . we used to get along okay . . . before Mom and Dad died. Now he just can't stand me."

"I think I like it better when the old man's hittin' me." Johnny sighed. "At least then I know he knows who I am. I walk in that house, and nobody says anything. I walk out, and nobody says anything. I stay away all night, and nobody notices. At least you got Soda. I ain't got nobody."

"Shoot," I said, startled out of my misery, "you got the whole gang. Dally didn't slug you tonight 'cause you're the pet. I mean, golly, Johnny, you got the whole gang."

"It ain't the same as having your own folks care about

you,” Johnny said simply. “It just ain’t the same.”

I was beginning to relax and wonder if running away was such a great idea. I was sleepy and freezing to death and I wanted to be home in bed, safe and warm under the covers with Soda’s arm across me. I decided I would go home and just not speak to Darry. It was my house as much as Darry’s, and if he wanted to pretend I wasn’t alive, that was just fine with me. He couldn’t stop me from living in my own house.

“Let’s walk to the park and back. Then maybe I’ll be cooled off enough to go home.”

“Okay,” Johnny said easily. “Okay.”

Things gotta get better, I figured. They couldn’t get worse. I was wrong.