

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.