

Chapter 5

I WOKE UP LATE IN the afternoon. For a second I didn't know where I was. You know how it is, when you wake up in a strange place and wonder where in the world you are, until memory comes rushing over you like a wave. I half convinced myself that I had dreamed everything that had happened the night before. I'm really home in bed, I thought. It's late and both Darry and Sodapop are up. Darry's cooking breakfast, and in a minute he and Soda will come in and drag me out of bed and wrestle me down and tickle me until I think I'll die if they don't stop. It's me and Soda's turn to do the dishes after we eat, and then we'll all go outside and play football. Johnny and Two-Bit and I will get Darry on our side, since Johnny and I are so small and Darry's the best player. It'll go like the usual weekend morning. I tried telling myself that while I lay on the cold rock floor, wrapped up in Dally's jacket and listening to the wind rushing through the trees' dry leaves outside.

Finally I quit pretending and pushed myself up. I was stiff and sore from sleeping on that hard floor, but I had never slept so soundly. I was still groggy. I pushed off Johnny's jeans jacket, which had somehow got thrown across me, and blinked, scratching my head. It was awful quiet, with just the sound of rushing wind in the trees. Suddenly I realized that Johnny wasn't there.

"Johnny?" I called loudly, and that old wooden church echoed me, onny onny... I looked around wildly, almost panic-stricken, but then caught sight of some crooked lettering written in the dust of the floor. Went to get supplies. Be back soon. J.C.

I sighed, and went to the pump to get a drink. The water from it was like liquid ice and it tasted funny, but it was water. I splashed some on my face and that woke me up pretty quick. I wiped my face off on Johnny's jacket and sat down on the back steps. The hill the church was on dropped off suddenly about twenty feet from the back door, and you could see for miles and miles. It was like sitting on the top of the world.

When you haven't got anything to do, you remember things in spite of yourself. I could remember every detail of the whole night, but it had the unreal quality of a dream.

It seemed much longer than twenty-four hours since Johnny and I had met Dally at the corner of Pickett and Sutton. Maybe it was. Maybe Johnny had been gone a whole week and I had just slept. Maybe he had already been worked over by the fuzz and was waiting to get the electric chair since he wouldn't tell where I was. Maybe Dally had been killed in a car wreck or something and no one would ever know where I was, and I'd just die up here, alone, and turn into a skeleton. My over-active imagination was running away with me again. Sweat ran down my face and back, and I was trembling. My head swam, and I leaned back and closed my eyes. I guess it was partly delayed shock. Finally my stomach calmed down and I relaxed a little, hoping that Johnny would remember cigarettes. I was scared, sitting there by myself.

I heard someone coming up through the dead leaves toward the back of the church, and I ducked inside the door. Then I heard a whistle, long and low, ending in a sudden high note. I knew that whistle well enough. It was used by us and the Shepard gang for "Who's there?" I returned it carefully, then darted out the door so fast that I fell off the steps and sprawled flat under Johnny's nose.

I propped myself on my elbows and grinned up at him. "Hey, Johnny. Fancy meetin' you here."

He looked down at me over a big package. "I swear, Ponyboy, you're gettin' to act more like Two-Bit every day."

I tried unsuccessfully to cock an eyebrow. "Who's acting?" I rolled over and sprang up, happy that someone was there. "What'd you get?"

"Come on inside. Dally told us to stay inside."

We went in. Johnny dusted off a table with his jacket and started taking things out of the sack and lining them up neatly. "A week's supply of baloney, two loaves of bread, a box of matches..." Johnny went on.

I got tired of watching him do it all, so I started digging into the sack myself. "Wheee!" I sat down on a dusty chair and stared. "A paperback copy of *Gone with the Wind*! How'd you know I always wanted one?"

Johnny reddened. "I remembered you sayin' something about it once. And me and you went to see that movie, 'member? I thought you could maybe read it out loud and help kill time or something."

"Gee, thanks." I put the book down reluctantly. I wanted to start it right then. "Peroxide? A deck of cards..." Suddenly I realized something. "Johnny, you ain't thinking of..."

Johnny sat down and pulled out his knife. "We're gonna cut our hair, and you're gonna bleach yours." He looked at the ground carefully. "They'll have our descriptions in the paper. We can't fit 'em."

"Oh, no!" My hand flew to my hair. "No, Johnny, not my hair!"

It was my pride. It was long and silky, just like Soda's, only a little redder. Our hair was tuff--- we didn't have to use much grease on it. Our hair labeled us greasers, too--- it was our trademark. The one thing we were proud of. Maybe we couldn't have Corvairs or madras shirts, but we could have hair.

"We'd have to anyway if we got caught. You know the first thing the judge does is make you get a haircut"

"I don't see why," I said sourly. "Dally could just as easily mug somebody with short hair."

"I don't know either--- it's just a way of trying to break us. They can't really do anything to guys like Curly Shepard or Tim; they've had about everything done to them. And they can't take anything away from them because they don't have anything in the first place. So they cut their hair."

I looked at Johnny imploringly. Johnny sighed. "I'm gonna cut mine too, and wash the grease out, but I can't bleach it. I'm too dark-skinned to look okay blond. Oh, come on, Ponyboy," he pleaded. "It'll grow back."

"Okay," I said, wide-eyed. "Get it over with."

Johnny flipped out the razor-edge of his switch, took hold of my hair, and started sawing on it. I shuddered. "Not too short," I begged. "Johnny, please..."

Finally it was over with. My hair looked funny, scattered over the floor in tufts. "It's lighter than I thought it was," I said, examining it. "Can I see what I look like now?"

"No," Johnny said slowly, staring at me. "We gotta bleach it first."

After I'd sat in the sun for fifteen minutes to dry the bleach, Johnny let me look in the old cracked mirror we'd found in a closet. I did a double take. My hair was even lighter than Sodapop's. I'd never combed it to the side like that. It just didn't look like me. It made me look younger, and scarer, too. Boy howdy, I thought, this really makes me look tuff. I look like a blasted pansy. I was miserable.

Johnny handed me the knife. He looked scared, too. "Cut the front and thin out the rest. I'll comb it back after I wash it."

"Johnny," I said tiredly, "you can't wash your hair in that freezing water in this weather. You'll get a cold."

He only shrugged. "Go ahead and cut it."

I did the best I could. He went ahead and washed it anyway, using the bar of soap he'd bought. I was glad I had had to run away with him instead of with Two-Bit or Steve or Dally. That would be one thing they'd never think of soap. I gave him Dally's jacket to wrap up in, and he sat shivering in the sunlight on the back steps, leaning against the door, combing his hair back. It was the first time I could see that he had eyebrows. He didn't look like Johnny. His forehead was whiter where his bangs had been; it would have

been funny if we hadn't been so scared. He was still shivering with cold. "I guess," he said weakly, "I guess we're disguised."

I leaned back next to him sullenly. "I guess so."

"Oh, shoot," Johnny said with fake cheerfulness, "it's just hair."

"Shoot nothing," I snapped. "It took me a long time to get that hair just the way I wanted it. And besides, this just ain't us. It's like being in a Halloween costume we can't get out of."

"Well, we got to get used to it," Johnny said with finality. "We're in big trouble and it's our looks or us."

I started eating a candy bar. "I'm still tired," I said. To my surprise, the ground blurred and I felt tears running down my cheeks. I brushed them off hurriedly. Johnny looked as miserable as I felt.

"I'm sorry I cut your hair off, Ponyboy."

"Oh, it ain't that," I said between bites of chocolate. "I mean, not all of it. I'm just a little spooky. I really don't know what's the matter. I'm just mixed up."

"I know," Johnny said through chattering teeth as we went inside. "Things have been happening so fast..." I put my arm across his shoulders to warm him up.

"Two-Bit shoulda been in that little one-horse store. Man, we're in the middle of nowhere; the nearest house is two miles away. Things were layin' out wide open, just waitin' for somebody slick like Two-Bit to come and pick 'em up. He coulda walked out with half the store." He leaned back beside me, and I could feel him trembling. "Good ol' Two-Bit," he said in a quavering voice. He must have been as homesick as I was.

"Remember how he was wisecrackin' last night?" I said. "Last night... just last night we were walkin' Cherry and Marcia over to Two-Bit's. Just last night we were layin' in the lot, lookin' up at the stars and dreaming..."

"Stop it!" Johnny gasped from between clenched teeth. "Shut up about last night! I killed a kid last night. He couldn't of been over seventeen or eighteen, and I killed him. How'd you like to live with that?" He was crying. I held him like Soda had held him the day we found him lying in the lot.

"I didn't mean to," he finally blurted out, "but they were drownin' you, and I was so scared..." He was quiet for a minute. "There sure is a lot of blood in people."

He got up suddenly and began pacing back and forth, slapping his pockets.

"Whatta we gonna do?" I was crying by then. It was getting dark and I was cold and lonesome. I closed my eyes and leaned my head back, but the tears came anyway.

"This is my fault," Johnny said in a miserable voice. He had stopped crying when I started. "For bringin' a little thirteen-year-old kid along. You ought to go home. You can't get into any trouble. You didn't kill him."

"No!" I screamed at him. "I'm fourteen! I've been fourteen for a month! And I'm in it as much as you are. I'll stop crying in a minute... I can't help it."

He slumped down beside me. "I didn't mean it like that, Ponyboy. Don't cry, Pony, we'll be okay. Don't cry..." I leaned against him and bawled until I went to sleep.

I woke up late that night. Johnny was resting against the wall and I was asleep on his shoulder. "Johnny?" I yawned. "You awake?" I was warm and sleepy.

"Yeah," he said quietly.

"We ain't gonna cry no more, are we?"

"Nope. We're all cried out now. We're gettin' used to the idea. We're gonna be okay now."

"That's what I thought," I said drowsily. Then for the first time since Dally and I had sat down behind those girls at the Nightly Double, I relaxed. We could take whatever was coming now.

THE NEXT FOUR or five days were the longest days I've ever spent in my life. We killed time by reading *Gone with the Wind* and playing poker. Johnny sure did like that book, although he didn't know anything about the Civil War and even less about plantations, and I had to explain a lot of it to him. It amazed me how Johnny could get more meaning out of some of the stuff in there than I could--- I was supposed to be the deep one. Johnny had failed a year in school and never made good grades--- he couldn't grasp anything that was shoved at him too fast, and I guess his teachers thought he was just plain dumb. But he wasn't. He was just a little slow to get things, and he liked to explore things once he did get them. He was especially stuck on the Southern gentlemen-- impressed with their manners and charm.

"I bet they were cool ol' guys," he said, his eyes glowing, after I had read the part about them riding into sure death because they were gallant. "They remind me of Dally."

"Dally?" I said, startled. "Shoot, he ain't got any more manners than I do. And you saw how he treated those girls the other night. Soda's more like them Southern boys."

"Yeah... in the manners bit, and the charm, too, I guess," Johnny said slowly, "but one night I saw Dally gettin' picked up by the fuzz, and he kept real cool and calm the whole time. They was gettin' him for breakin' out the windows in the school building, and it was Two-Bit who did that. And Dally knew it. But he just took the sentence without battin' an eye or even denyin' it. That's gallant."

That was the first time I realized the extent of Johnny's hero-worship for Dally Winston. Of all of us, Dally was the one I liked least. He didn't have Soda's understanding or dash, or Two-Bit's humor, or even Darry's superman qualities. But I

realized that these three appealed to me because they were like the heroes in the novels I read. Dally was real. I liked my books and clouds and sunsets. Dally was so real he scared me.

Johnny and I never went to the front of the church. You could see the front from the road, and sometimes farm kids rode their horses by on their way to the store. So we stayed in the very back, usually sitting on the steps and looking across the valley. We could see for miles; see the ribbon of highway and the small dots that were houses and cars. We couldn't watch the sunset, since the back faced east, but I loved to look at the colors of the fields and the soft shadings of the horizon.

One morning I woke up earlier than usual. Johnny and I slept huddled together for warmth--- Dally had been right when he said it would get cold where we were going. Being careful not to wake Johnny up, I went to sit on the steps and smoke a cigarette. The dawn was coming then. All the lower valley was covered with mist, and sometimes little pieces of it broke off and floated away in small clouds. The sky was lighter in the east, and the horizon was a thin golden line. The clouds changed from gray to pink, and the mist was touched with gold. There was a silent moment when everything held its breath, and then the sun rose. It was beautiful.

"Golly"--- Johnny's voice beside me made me jump--- "that sure was pretty."

"Yeah." I sighed, wishing I had some paint to do a picture with while the sight was still fresh in my mind.

"The mist was what was pretty," Johnny said. "All gold and silver."

"Uhhmmm," I said, trying to blow a smoke ring.

"Too bad it couldn't stay like that all the time."

"Nothing gold can stay." I was remembering a poem I'd read once.

"What?"

*"Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay."*

Johnny was staring at me. "Where'd you learn that? That was what I meant"

"Robert Frost wrote it. He meant more to it than I'm gettin' though." I was trying to find the meaning the poet had in mind, but it eluded me. "I always remembered it because I never quite got what he meant by it"

"You know," Johnny said slowly, "I never noticed colors and clouds and stuff until you kept reminding me about them. It seems like they were never there before." He thought for a minute. "Your family sure is funny."

"And what happens to be so funny about it?" I asked stiffly.

Johnny looked at me quickly. "I didn't mean nothing. I meant, well, Soda kinda looks like your mother did, but he acts just exactly like your father. And Darry is the spittin' image of your father, but he ain't wild and laughing all the time like he was. He acts like your mother. And you don't act like either one."

"I know," I said. "Well," I said, thinking this over, "you ain't like any of the gang. I mean, I couldn't tell Two-Bit or Steve or even Darry about the sunrise and clouds and stuff. I couldn't even remember that poem around them. I mean, they just don't dig. Just you and Sodapop. And maybe Cherry Valance."

Johnny shrugged. "Yeah," he said with a sigh. "I guess we're different."

"Shoot," I said, blowing a perfect smoke ring, "maybe they are."

By the fifth day I was so tired of baloney I nearly got sick every time I looked at it. We had eaten all our candy bars in the first two days. I was dying for a Pepsi. I'm what you might call a Pepsi addict. I drink them like a fiend, and going for five days without one was about to kill me. Johnny promised to get some if we ran out of supplies and had to get some more, but that didn't help me right then. I was smoking a lot more there than I usually did--- I guess because it was something to do--- although Johnny warned me that I would get sick smoking so much. We were careful with our cigarettes--- if that old church ever caught fire there'd be no stopping it.

On the fifth day I had read up to Sherman's siege of Atlanta in *Gone with the Wind*, owed Johnny a hundred and fifty bucks from poker games, smoked two packs of Camels, and as Johnny had predicted, got sick. I hadn't eaten anything all day; and smoking on an empty stomach doesn't make you feel real great. I curled up in a corner to sleep off the smoke. I was just about asleep when I heard, as if from a great distance, a low long whistle that went off in a sudden high note. I was too sleepy to pay any attention, although Johnny didn't have any reason to be whistling like that. He was sitting on the back steps trying to read *Gone with the Wind*. I had almost decided that I had dreamed the outside world and there was nothing real but baloney sandwiches and the Civil War and the old church and the mist in the valley. It seemed to me that I had always lived in the church, or maybe lived during the Civil War and had somehow got transplanted. That shows you what a wild imagination I have.

A toe nudged me in the ribs. "Glory," said a rough but familiar voice, "he looks different with his hair like that."

I rolled over and sat up, rubbing the sleep out of my eyes and yawning. Suddenly I blinked.

"Hey, Dally!"

"Hey, Ponyboy!" He grinned down at me. "Or should I say Sleeping Beauty?"

I never thought I'd live to see the day when I would be so glad to see Dally Winston, but right then he meant one thing: contact with the outside world. And it suddenly became real and vital.

"How's Sodapop? Are the fuzz after us? Is Darry all right? Do the boys know where we are? What..."

"Hold on, kid," Dally broke in. "I can't answer everything at once. You two want to go get something to eat first? I skipped breakfast and I'm about starved."

"You're starved?" Johnny was so indignant he nearly squeaked. I remembered the baloney.

"Is it safe to go out?" I asked eagerly.

"Yep." Dally searched his shirt pocket for a cigarette, and finding none, said, "Gotta cancer stick, Johnnycake?"

Johnny tossed him a whole package.

"The fuzz won't be lookin' for you around here," Dally said, lighting up. "They think you've lit out for Texas. I've got Buck's T-bird parked down the road a little way. Goshamighty, boys, ain't you been eatin' anything?"

Johnny looked startled. "Yeah. Whatever gave you the idea we ain't?"

Dally shook his head. "You're both pale and you've lost weight. After this, get out in the sun more. You look like you've been through the mill."

I started to say "Look who's talking" but decided it would be safer not to. Dally needed a shave--- a stubble of colorless beard covered his jaw--- and he looked like he was the one who'd been sleeping in his clothes for a week instead of us; I knew he hadn't seen a barber in months. But it was safer not to get mouthy with Dally Winston.

"Hey, Ponyboy"--- he fumbled with a piece of paper in his back pocket--- "I gotta letter for you."

"A letter? Who from?"

"The President, of course, stupid. It's from Soda."

"Sodapop?" I said, bewildered. "But how did he know...?"

"He came over to Buck's a couple of days ago for something and found that sweat shirt. I told him I didn't know where you were, but he didn't believe me. He gave me this letter and half his pay check to give you. Kid, you ought to see Darry. He's takin' this mighty hard..."

I wasn't listening. I leaned back against the side of the church and read:

Ponyboy,

Well I guess you got into some trouble, huh? Darry and me nearly went nuts when you ran out like that. Darry is awful sorry he hit you. You know he didn't mean it. And then you and Johnny turned up missing and what with that dead kid in the park and Dally getting hauled into the station, well it scared us something awful. The police came by to question us and we told them as much as we could. I can't believe little old Johnny could kill somebody. I know Dally knows where you are, but you know him. He keeps his trap shut and won't tell me nothing. Darry hasn't got the slightest notion where you're at and it is nearly killing him. I wish you'd come back and turn your selves in but I guess you can't since Johnny might get hurt. You sure are famous. You got a paragraph in the newspaper even. Take care and say hi to Johnny for us.

Sodapop Curtis

He could improve his spelling, I thought after reading it through three or four times. "How come you got hauled in?" I asked Dally.

"Shoot, kid"--- he grinned wolfishly--- "them boys at the station know me by now. I get hauled in for everything that happens in our turf. While I was there I kinda let it slip that y'all were headin' for Texas. So that's where they're lookin'."

He took a drag on his cigarette and cussed it goodnaturedly for not being a Kool. Johnny listened in admiration. "You sure can cuss good, Dally."

"Sure can," Dally agreed wholeheartedly, proud of his vocabulary. "But don't you kids get to pickin' up my bad habits."

He gave me a hard rub on the head. "Kid, I swear it don't look like you with your hair all cut off. It used to look tuff. You and Soda had the coolest lookin' hair in town."

"I know," I said sourly. "I look lousy, but don't rub it in."

"Do y'all want somethin' to eat or not?"

Johnny and I leaped up. "You'd better believe it"

"Gee," Johnny said wistfully, "it sure will be good to get into a car again."

"Well," Dally drawled, "I'll give you a ride for your money."

Dally always did like to drive fast, as if he didn't care whether he got where he was going or not, and we came down the red dirt road off Jay Mountain doing eighty-five. I like fast driving and Johnny was crazy about drag races, but we both got a little green around the gills when Dally took a corner on two wheels with the brakes screaming. Maybe it was because we hadn't been in a car for so long.

We stopped at a Dairy Queen and the first thing I got was a Pepsi. Johnny and I gorged on barbecue sandwiches and banana splits.

"Glory," Dallas said, amazed, watching us gulp the stuff down. "You don't need to make like every mouthful's your last. I got plenty of money. Take it easy, I don't want you gettin' sick on me. And I thought I was hungry!"

Johnny merely ate faster. I didn't slow down until I got a headache.

"I didn't tell y'all something," Dally said, finishing his third hamburger. "The Socs and us are having all-out warfare all over the city. That kid you killed had plenty of friends and all over town it's Soc against grease. We can't walk alone at all. I started carryin' a heater..."

"Dally!" I said, frightened. "You kill people with heaters!"

"Ya kill 'em with switchblades, too, don't ya, kid?" Dally said in a hard voice. Johnny gulped. "Don't worry," Dally went on, "it ain't loaded. I ain't aimin' to get picked up for murder. But it sure does help a bluff. Tim Shepard's gang and our outfit are havin' it out with the Socs tomorrow night at the vacant lot. We got hold of the president of one of their social clubs and had a war council. Yeah"--- Dally sighed, and I knew he was remembering New York--- "just like the good old days. If they win, things go on as usual. If we do, they stay outa our territory but good. Two-Bit got jumped a few days ago. Darry and me came along in time, but he wasn't havin' too much trouble. Two-Bit's a good fighter. Hey, I didn't tell you we got us a spy."

"A spy?" Johnny looked up from his banana split. "Who?"

"That good-lookin' broad I tried to pick up that night you killed the Soc. The redhead, Cherry what's-her-name."