

Chapter 11

I HAD TO STAY IN BED a whole week after that. That bugged me; I'm not the kind that can lie around looking at the ceiling all the time. I read most of the time, and drew pictures. One day I started flipping through one of Soda's old yearbooks and came across a picture that seemed vaguely familiar. Not even when I read the name Robert Sheldon did it hit me who it was. And then I finally realized it was Bob. I took a real good long look at it.

The picture didn't look a whole lot like the Bob I remembered, but nobody ever looks a whole lot like his picture in a yearbook anyway. He had been a sophomore that year--- that would make him about eighteen when he died. Yeah, he was good-looking even then, with a grin that reminded me of Soda's, a kind of reckless grin. He had been a handsome black-haired boy with dark eyes--- maybe brown, like Soda's, maybe dark-blue, like the Shepard boys'. Maybe he'd had black eyes. Like Johnny. I had never given Bob much thought--- I hadn't had time to think. But that day I wondered about him. What was he like?

I knew he liked to pick fights, had the usual Soc belief that living on the West Side made you Mr. Super-Tuff, looked good in dark wine-colored sweaters, and was proud of his rings. But what about the Bob Sheldon that Cherry Valance knew? She was a smart girl; she didn't like him just because he was good-looking. Sweet and friendly, stands out from the crowd--- that's what she had said. A real person, the best buddy a guy ever had, kept trying to make somebody stop him--- Randy had told me that. Did he have a kid brother who idolized him? Maybe a big brother who kept bugging him not to be so wild? His parents let him run wild--- because they loved him too much or too little? Did they hate us now? I hoped they hated us, that they weren't full of that pity-the-victims-of-environment junk the social workers kept handing Curly Shepard every time he got sent off to reform school. I'd rather have anybody's hate than their pity. But, then, maybe they understood, like Cherry Valance. I looked at Bob's picture and I could begin to see the person we had killed. A reckless, hot-tempered boy, cocky and scared stiff at the same time.

"Ponyboy."

"Yeah?" I didn't look up. I thought it was the doctor. He'd been coming over to see me almost every day, although he didn't do much except talk to me.

"There's a guy here to see you. Says he knows you." Something in Darry's voice made me look up, and his eyes were hard. "His name's Randy."

"Yeah, I know him," I said.

"You want to see him?"

"Yeah." I shrugged. "Sure, why not?"

A few guys from school had dropped by to see me; I have quite a few friends at school even if I am younger than most of them and don't talk much. But that's what they are--- school friends, not buddies. I had been glad to see them, but it bothered me because we live in kind of a lousy neighborhood and our house isn't real great. It's run-down looking and everything, and the inside's kind of poor-looking, too, even though for a bunch of boys we do a pretty good job of house-cleaning. Most of my friends at school come from good homes, not filthy rich like the Socs, but middle class, anyway. It was a funny thing--- it bugged me about my friends seeing our house. But I couldn't have cared less about what Randy thought.

"Hi, Ponyboy." Randy looked uncomfortable standing in the doorway.

"Hi, Randy," I said. "Have a seat if you can find one." Books were lying all over everything. He pushed a couple off a chair and sat down.

"How you feeling? Cherry told me your name was on the school bulletin."

"I'm okay. You can't really miss my name on any kind of bulletin."

He still looked uncomfortable, although he tried to grin.

"Wanna smoke?" I offered him a weed, but he shook his head. "No, thanks. Uh, Ponyboy, one reason I came here was to see if you were okay, but you--- we--- got to go see the judge tomorrow."

"Yeah," I said, lighting a cigarette. "I know. Hey, holler if you see one of my brothers coming. I'll catch it for smoking in bed."

"My dad says for me to tell the truth and nobody can get hurt. He's kind of upset about all this. I mean, my dad's a good guy and everything, better than most, and I kind of let him down, being mixed up in all this."

I just looked at him. That was the dumbest remark I ever heard anyone make. He thought he was mixed up in this? He didn't kill anyone, he didn't get his head busted in a rumble, it wasn't his buddy that was shot down under a street light. Besides, what did he have to lose? His old man was rich, he could pay whatever fine there was for being drunk and picking a fight.

"I wouldn't mind getting fined," Randy said, "but I feel lousy about the old man. And it's the first time I've felt anything in a long time."

The only thing I'd felt in a long time was being scared. Scared stiff. I'd put off thinking about the judge and the hearing for as long as I could. Soda and Darry didn't like to talk about it either, so we were all silently counting off the days while I was sick, counting the days that we had left together. But with Randy sticking solidly to the subject it was impossible to think about anything else. My cigarette started trembling.

"I guess your folks feel kind of awful about it, too."

"My parents are dead. I live here with just Darry and Soda, my brothers." I took a long drag on my cigarette. "That's what's worrying me. If the judge decides Darry isn't a good guardian or something, I'm liable to get stuck in a home somewhere. That's the rotten part of this deal. Darry is a good guardian; he makes me study and knows where I am and who I'm with all the time. I mean, we don't get along so great sometimes, but he keeps me out of trouble, or did. My father didn't yell at me as much as he does."

"I didn't know that" Randy looked worried, he really did. A Soc, even, worried because some kid greaser was on his way to a foster home or something. That was really funny. I don't mean funny. You know what I mean.

"Listen to me, Pony. You didn't do anything. It was your friend Johnny that had the knife..."

"I had it" I stopped him. He was looking at me strangely. "I had the knife. I killed Bob."

Randy shook his head. "I saw it. You were almost drowned. It was the black-headed guy that had the switchblade. Bob scared him into doing it. I saw it."

I was bewildered. "I killed him. I had a switchblade and I was scared they were going to beat me up."

"No, kid, it was your friend, the one who died in the hospital..."

"Johnny is not dead." My voice was shaking. "Johnny is not dead."

"Hey, Randy" Darry stuck his head in the door. "I think you'd better go now."

"Sure," Randy said. He was still looking at me kind of funny. "See you around, Pony."

"Don't ever say anything to him about Johnny," I heard Darry say in a low voice as they went out. "He's still pretty racked up mentally and emotionally. The doc said he'd get over it if we gave him time."

I swallowed hard and blinked. He was just like all the rest of the Socs. Cold-blooded mean. Johnny didn't have anything to do with Bob's getting killed.

"Ponyboy Curtis, put out that cigarette!"

"Okay, okay." I put it out. "I ain't going to go to sleep smoking, Darry. If you make me stay in bed there ain't anywhere else I can smoke."

"You're not going to die if you don't get a smoke. But if that bed catches on fire you will. You couldn't make it to the door through that mess."

"Well, golly, I can't pick it up and Soda doesn't, so I guess that leaves you."

He was giving me one of those looks. "All right, all right," I said, "that don't leave you. Maybe Soda'll straighten it up a little."

"Maybe you can be a little neater, huh, little buddy?"

He'd never called me that before. Soda was the only one he ever called "little buddy."

"Sure," I said, "I'll be more careful."