

EXCERPT FROM CHAPTER 2 OF *THE OUTSIDERS* BY S.E. HINTON

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 fumed around and watched us. "That's the greaser that jockeys for the Slash sometime," 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.

Excerpt from Hinton. S.E. (1967). The Outsiders. Viking.