

S.E. HINTON

**that was then,
this is now**



BONUS MATERIAL INSIDE

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Mark and me went down to the bar/pool hall about two or three blocks from where we lived with the sole intention of making some money. We'd done that before. I was a really good pool player, especially for being just sixteen years old, and, what's more, I look like a baby-faced kid who wouldn't know one ball from another. This, and the way Mark set me up, helped me hustle a lot of pool games. The bad deal is, it's against the law to be in this pool hall if you're under age, because of the adjoining bar. The good deal is, the bartender and owner was a good friend of mine, being the older brother of this chick I used to like. When this chick and me broke up, I still stayed friends with her brother, which is unusual in cases like that. Charlie, the bartender, was just twenty-two, but he had a tough reputation and kept order real good. We lived in kind of a rough part of town and some pretty wild things went on in Charlie's Bar.

I looked around for a plainclothes cop when we

went in—I can always tell a cop—but didn't find one, so I went up to the bar and hopped on a barstool.

“Give me a beer,” I said, and Charlie, who was cleaning glasses just like every bartender you ever see, gave me a dirty look instead. “O.K.,” I said brightly, “a Coke.”

“Your credit ain't so hot, Bryon,” Charlie said. “You got cash?”

“A dime—for cryin' out loud! Can't you let me charge a dime Coke?”

“Cokes are fifteen cents, and you already got three dollars worth of Cokes charged here, and if you don't pay up this month I'll have to beat it out of you.” He said this real friendly-like, but he meant it. We were friends, but Charlie was a businessman too.

“I'll pay up,” I assured him. “Don't worry.”

Charlie gave me a lopsided grin. “I ain't worried, kid. You're the one who should be worried.”

I was, to tell the truth. Charlie was a big, tough guy so a three-dollar beating up was something to worry about.

“Hey, Mark,” Charlie called, “there ain't nobody here to hustle.”

Mark, who had been scouting out the two guys playing pool, came up and sat down next to me. “Yeah, that's the truth.”

“It's just as well,” Charlie said. “You guys are going to get in real bad trouble one of these days. Some guy's

going to get hacked off when he finds out what you're doin', and you're gonna get a pool stick rammed down your throats."

"No we ain't," Mark said. "Give me a Coke, Charlie."

"We don't have any credit," I said glumly.

Mark stared at Charlie disbelievingly. "You got to be kiddin'. Man, when did we ever not pay our bill?"

"Last month."

"You said you'd add it on to this month's. That's what you said. So I don't see why you can't add twenty cents to that."

"Thirty cents," corrected Charlie. "And, like I just told Bryon, if I don't get that money pretty soon, I'm going to take it out of a couple of hides."

"I'll get you the money tomorrow if you give us the Cokes right now."

"O.K." Charlie gave in to Mark. Almost everybody does. It was a gift he had, a gift for getting away with things. He could talk anyone into anything. "But if I don't get the money by tomorrow, I'll come looking for you."

I got chilled. I had heard Charlie say that to another guy once. I also saw the guy after Charlie found him. But if Mark said he'd have three dollars by tomorrow, he'd have it.

"Speaking of looking for you," Charlie continued, "the true flower child was in here asking for you."

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