

TRUE LOVE WAYS

By Deena Gomersall



ILLUSTRATED BY CHAS

AN 'ADULT TV' NOVEL

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Chapter One: FORBIDDEN LOVE

The pretty, young girl was crying. She had just been dumped by Jeff, the leader of the Black Abbotts street gang.

A succession of girls before her had won the affection of Jeff, only to be bedded and then left cold. Girls were just for screwing according to his way of thinking. They came in third after gang fighting and the occasional theft.

"Girls are good for only one thing, man. You fuck 'em and leave 'em. Know what I mean?" he told his friend Baz, smirking.

In spite of the way he treated them, Jeff was never short of girl company. He had been with every female member of the gang as well as most of the girls in his neighborhood. He was a rugged eighteen-year-old who stood 6'2" with dark curly hair combed into a Tony Curtis style. He had a cleft chin and deep brown eyes that left girls swooning. His muscular arms and well-developed chest gave testimony to the fact that he worked out a lot. He was a very good fighter and most rival gang members stayed clear of him.

Jeff's own gang boasted twenty-two members. Seven were girls though he didn't really count them as part of the gang. They were there to provide sex if there was nothing else going on. Girls were soft and prissy, always nattering about their complexions and fixing their makeup. A gang member should be able to fight. How can anyone fight or run after turning over a liquor store while wearing stiletto heels?

"Aren't you gonna be seein' me no more, Jeff? I thought I meant somethin' to ya," the girl called out as Jeff and Baz walked away from her.

"Get a life! You've been with the best. Just be grateful for that," Jeff returned without looking around.

"Well, don't think ya can just come back and get me back into bed whenever you like," she cried bitterly.

"Hey babe, I can get laid anytime I want by whoever I want. Besides, on a scale of one to ten, you're a two," Jeff scoffed back. Baz laughed aloud at the remark. Inside, though, he had a different opinion of the self-assured chauvinistic gang leader. He wasn't prepared to speak his mind, though. He had more sense.

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About this time, a new family was moving into the block. This was a family with a better upbringing than most of the residents there, but one that had fallen on hard

times recently. It didn't take the father of the family long to recognize the local trouble-makers...especially their gang leader.

Likewise, it didn't take long for Jeff to notice the "new talent" in the form of the man's pretty sixteen-year-old daughter.

"Hey! Take a look at that piece of ass!" Eddie, another of the gang members said on seeing her.

"What's your bet that I'm inside her panties within a week?" was Jeff's response.

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The following evening Stan Brady, the father of the new family in town, was walking back from the local store when he witnessed two youths snatch a bag from an elderly woman and run off down the street. Stan gave chase but failed to catch up with them. He was pretty sure that one of them had been the abusive youth he had often seen hanging around; the one he believed to be the leader of the local gang of thugs.

On his return home, Stan started complaining as he removed his jacket.

"I have just watched two louts grab some poor woman's bag and run off down the road. What is this goddamned world coming to? I knew we shouldn't have moved to this neighborhood. I'm fairly sure that they belong to the gang that hang around the street corner and down at the mall."

"And I suppose you were the big hero as usual and got involved," his wife Pam said.

"Sure I did. Who wouldn't? Unfortunately, I couldn't catch up with the little shits. They'd have regretted it if I had."

"Yes honey, and maybe *you* would have regretted it, too. These people carry knives, you know? You shouldn't get involved. Let the police deal with them, that's what they're for. *Your* responsibility is at home."

"Yeah, I know, but the cops can't be everywhere. If every citizen buries his head in the sand, then these characters are going to get away with it every time. Anyway, it should at least serve as a warning to you and Tracy. Watch your back when you're out there. I think one of them was the head of the gang."

Tracy glanced up at her dad. "You mean that tall, dark-haired one who always wears a white T-shirt and black leather jacket?"

"Yeah, that's the one."

"How do you know that, Dad ? I mean, we only just moved here. Just because he stands around on street corners with his friends doesn't mean he's bad. You always take an instant dislike to people, anyway. *I* think he's quite dishy."

Stan glanced at his daughter and was about to reply to her comment. Instead, he opted to just wave his hand, saying, "Phaah!"

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Tracy and her new friend Louise were returning home from school when they saw several youths on the corner.

"Hey, that's the guy I was telling you about, Lou. Don't you think that he's kind of cute?"

Louise giggled and nodded as the two of them drew nearer to the gang members.

"Hi there!" came a voice from the gang.

Tracy looked up blushing and she clutched her friend's arm. *He* was calling. She couldn't believe it. Tracy halted her friend as she looked at Jeff. Then she turned red in the face as he came over to her.

"You're new around here, aren't ya? My name's Jeff...Jeff Bennet. I hang around here with the guys. This here is Eddie, that's Col and the big stupid-looking one, that's Al," Jeff told her, making all but Al laugh.

"Hi. I'm Tracy Jackson and this is my best friend, Louise."

"Hi Tracy, great to meet ya. Hi, Louise...I recall seeing you before. Say, if you ain't got nothin' better planned for this evenin', why not join us? There ain't much doin' around these parts but we'll be goin' for a Coke or somethin'."

"Oh, I don't know, Jeff. My Daddy's a bit strict, he likes to know where I'm at and who I'm with."

"So what about you Louise? You comin'?" Eddie butted in.

"Sorry, I can't. I've got loads of homework," Tracy's friend replied.

"So that's decided," Jeff announced. "You just tell your old man that you're going to your friend's house to do homework with her, then come on down to the Coffee Bar. My treat, you know what I'm sayin'?"

"I don't know. I don't like telling lies to my parents."

"What's the big deal about a tiny white lie that gets you out havin' fun instead of being cooped up?" Jeff asked.

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That's how Tracy came to know Jeff's gang. She didn't want to be untruthful to her folks but she really did fancy the handsome gang leader; it seemed that he was interested in her, too. She began joining the gang in secret whenever she could. Her parents always believed she was at Louise's house studying and they would warn her to "take care" on the way home.

The other girls in the gang didn't take to Tracy. They resented her for being better brought-up and better educated than they were. They considered her a real Goody Two-Shoes and considered her a snob.

Jeff, on the other hand, took to Tracy more than he had to any previous girlfriend. There was just something about her that was different. Maybe he just had respect for

her intelligence and her principles; he found her a refreshing change from the street-hardened girls who would throw themselves at him, common girls who used guttural language and dressed shabbily.

The gang members began to notice a difference in their leader. He would repeatedly defend her from anyone who badmouthed her or gave her a hard time. Jeff was careful to shield her from the other guys in the gang.

As time passed on by he began seeing more of Tracy and less of his friends.

"He's smitten with that stuck-up bitch," was the way Lisa, one of the girl members, viewed it.

"He's goin' soft," was how Eddie described Jeff's attitude.

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The two of them were taking a stroll in the park one afternoon. Jeff's arm was placed protectively around Tracy's shoulder as they walked along.

"I wonder what your old man would say if he knew that I was takin' his daughter out?" Jeff asked. "I know he doesn't like me much."

"He doesn't know you. He sees people like you as ruffians. You hang around with the gang all the time and they cause trouble."

"Well maybe he has a point, Trace. I have been bad news, I guess, but a guy can't go on actin' like that for the rest of his life. He has to grow up some time, know what I mean? I think you're making me do that, Trace. Grow up, I mean," Jeff told her as he gave her shoulder an affectionate squeeze.

Tracy smiled happily. "You know, Jeff, we've been seeing each other for two months now. How do you see things going for us? I mean...would you give up the gang for me?"

"I dunno about givin' the gang up, Trace. I see little of the guys as it is now. I guess I'd give up crime. Why do you want me to, though?"

"Because we always have to meet in secret. You keep me away from the other members of the gang. Well, I'd really like it better if Mom and Daddy knew that I was seeing you. I want them to meet you, see how nice you really are. I know that you would like them."

Jeff looked into Tracy's pretty, smiling face. "Never thought I'd consider changing for a *girl!*"

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Stan Brady answered the knock on his door. To his surprise he recognized the caller as the leader of the local gang. "What the hell do *you* want?" he stormed before turning his head to call his wife. "Pam, Pam, phone the Police, we got a street thug at the door. Hurry."

"No, wait, Mr. Brady, You got it wrong. Look, I'm on my own."

Stan looked around suspiciously. There was nobody else in sight. "So, what do you want here? You got no business with me or my family, you're just a thief and a hooligan. I saw you snatch that purse from that poor, defenseless woman a few months back."

"WHAT! Hey, just a minute, man. I didn't mug any old ladies. I ain't like that. Okay, I've turned over a few stores, done a bit of joy ridin', but I never took a purse off some lady...or anyone else for that matter."

"Well it sure *looked* like you. Anyway, you still haven't told me your business at my door."

"Well Sir, I just wanna tell you that your daughter Tracy and I...well, we've been seein' each other an' all. I just wanted to tell you 'cause we don't want to be doin' it behind your backs. I ain't taking advantage of her or nothin' 'cause I really respect her."

Stan's face reddened visibly before he exploded in wrath.

"You've been doing *what*? Get the hell outta here! How *dare* you come to my home saying such things! My daughter is well brought-up. She would never dream of going out with a lowlife scum like you."

"But it's true, Mr. Brady. Listen, I didn't need to come here and tell you this you know, but Tracy asked me to."

Stan lunged for the young man and pinned him against the door frame by his shoulders. "You leave my daughter alone, you bastard. You hear? You leave her alone or I'll kill you!"

"DAD! Leave him alone!" Tracy suddenly screamed from inside, running up and trying to tug her father from Jeff.

Stan turned his attention to his daughter. "Tracy, is it true? Have you been going out with this rabble?"

"Jeff is *not* rabble, Dad, he's kind and thoughtful. He doesn't even hang out with the gang anymore. He doesn't do anything illegal."

"I don't believe this! You ARE seeing him! Go to your room, young lady...you're grounded."

Jeff pulled himself free from Stan's grasp and straightened his jacket. "I'll overlook that, Mr. Brady," he grunted, "you being Tracy's Dad an' all, but don't go grabbin' me like that no more."

"Why? What would you normally do...kick the other guy's head in, run a knife through them?"

"I don't use blades, Mr. Brady. I don't need any tool to fight with. You got no right groundin' your daughter. She ain't done nothin' wrong. Is it a crime for her to go out with a guy? I look after her, this is a rough neighborhood."

"Yes, and you're one of the main reasons. I want you to keep away from my daughter. You hear me?"

"I hear you, but you can't keep her locked away forever. I love Tracy and I intend to see her again...with or without your blessing. I came here hopin' that we might get along, but that's up to you."

Jeff began walking away from the door with Stan's warning shouts for him to stay away echoing behind him.

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For the next few weeks, Jeff could only see Tracy as she walked to and from school. She wanted to cut school to spend more time with him, but Jeff wouldn't hear of it. He explained that it would only make matters worse if her father was to hear of it.

Pam kept an open mind about her daughter's affair and talked to her daughter about her feelings. She tried to persuade her that there were better boys out there, ones that would be less trouble; nice, smart college boys for instance. She could tell that her daughter had already developed deep feelings for this particular boy. She could not be sure whether it was just some teenage crush or not.

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Jeff was walking Tracy home from school one afternoon, two weeks after the incident with her dad. Stan had lifted his daughter's grounding but remained cautious about where she went and who she was with. He still hadn't figured out that Jeff was seeing her daughter when she was supposed to be at Louise's, working.

"So, what will you be doing tonight?" Tracy asked. She was feeling jealous of his contact with other girls and hoped that he wouldn't start going with someone else instead of her because he couldn't see her regularly.

"Oh, I dunno. Some of the guys, Frankie, Del and Boycie are all goin' uptown to see some girls. Eddie and Rick were talkin' about breakin' into some warehouse down Second and Main."

"You're not thinking of joining them, are you?"

"Sure I'm not, babe," Jeff replied as he put a look of mock hurt on his face. "I told you, I'm *outta* crime. I ain't takin' no risk of getting put in jail an' not being able to see you."

"So...what *have* you got lined up?" Tracy pressed.

"Hey! what is this, the third degree?" Jeff laughed. "You know, at one time I wouldn't be tellin' no broad my business, but *you*. Damn, I don't know what it is you're doin' but you're changin' me."

"For the better though, darling," Tracy added.

"Yeah, for the better...I guess. I dunno, I thought I might go up to the McDonalds with Baz, Col and some of the girls."

"Which girls?" Tracy asked suspiciously.

Jeff responded by giving Tracy a stare.

"If you really *must* know, Sheila, Luce and Babs. I seem to be hangin' with the girls more than the guys these days...just to keep outta trouble. Before you say anythin', no, I ain't interested in any of the girls, OK ? And I ain't screwing them."

"I'm sorry, Jeff. It's just, with me not being able to see you, I feel so jealous. I just wish I could be with you. Promise me that you won't find anyone else."

"I promise, Babe, and I miss you, too. There ain't nobody else like you, I've told you that."

"Do you know what I wish for?" Tracy said, lowering her voice.

"What?"

"I...I wish I could go to bed with you like all those other girls have."

Jeff's expression changed and he gripped Tracy's shoulders "Listen. All those girls, they meant nothin' to me. You are special. You're only sixteen, Trace and I respect you. I don't want us doin' anything until the time is right. We have all the time in the world 'cause I ain't leaving you."

Just then the loud sound of screeching brakes was heard from across the road. "TRACY! Get over here this minute!" It was Tracy's dad.

Tracy looked frightened and Jeff held onto her protectively as Stan climbed out of the car.

"Go sit in the car, Tracy. NOW!" Stan ordered. "And let me warn you, young man. You try attacking me and you'll be looking at assault charges."

"I have no intentions of attacking you, Mister," Jeff replied politely as he let go of Tracy's shoulders.

Stan pulled Tracy's hand, forcing her towards him. "You'd better not try, I warn you. I know your type."

Stan then led Tracy back to his car as she cried bitterly. Once there, he turned back towards Jeff.

"I'll tell you one last time. Keep away from my daughter! I intend to put a restraining order on you. I'll *keep* you away from her."

Tracy tried to plead with her father amidst her tears to no avail. He was very determined.

"This is for your own good, Honey. Don't you see? His sort is no good."

Stan Brady remained true to his word and a few days later Jeff received an official letter from the courts prohibiting him from seeing Tracy Brady. Jeff, of course, was no stranger to breaking the law, especially if it involved something he dearly wanted. He continued to see Tracy in spite of the restrictions; he just did it more cautiously.

In spite of Stan's dislike for him, Jeff really *had* changed his ways and wished for nothing more than to be able to prove it to Tracy's parent's. He wanted to show that he was no longer involved in crime, that his feelings for her were real and honorable. The more Stan tried to keep them apart, the more Jeff's feelings grew.

In an attempt to prove he had changed and was decent, he tried to find the real mugger that Mr. Brady had thought was him and he tried to find himself permanent employment.

The same muggers had struck several times in the area since that first incident. Through his connections, Jeff was given the name of one of them. This he handed to the police. As a result, the two muggers were arrested and charged with a string of offenses. In the past, Jeff would never have been the sort of person to rat on anyone but he was desperate to win Tracy's parents' approval and prove his worth.

After the arrest of the two muggers he attempted once more to call at Tracy's door. This time, the door was answered by Pam, Tracy's mother.

"Good evening, Mrs. Brady. You probably don't know who I am but..."

"I know *exactly* who you are, dear. You know you shouldn't be calling here, don't you?"

"Yes, I know that, Ma'am, but if Mr. Brady is in, I would like a word with him."

"Fortunately, he isn't. He's taken Tracy over to her uncle's. What is it that you want?"

Jeff already knew that Tracy was visiting her Uncle that evening but he wasn't aware that her dad was taking her.

"Well, Ma'am, it's just that your husband accused me of mugging some old lady. I've just come by to inform you that the police now have the people responsible in custody. So, you see, I didn't do it, just like I said."

"Well, thank you for letting us know that, Jeffrey, I'll make sure that Mr. Brady is aware of it."

"Oh, before I go, Mrs. Brady, could I ask you somethin'? Are you also against Tracy seein' me? I really don't intend to mistreat her or let any harm come to her, you know."

"I really don't know enough about you to form any opinions. I know that Tracy likes you and won't have a word said against you, but I also know that you have been in trouble with the police."

"Yeah, I admit it but that's all behind me now, really. I'm even tryin' to get a job. That's how much I care for your daughter."

"Well, maybe but she is only sixteen and her father loves his little girl very much. She is our only child, Jeffrey and it's understandable that he feels protective towards her. I would leave now if I were you before he returns. It would be best to keep your distance for the time being, but I'll make sure he gets your message."

Jeff left believing that he had won a small victory. At least Mrs. Brady wasn't totally opposed to him.

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Jeff's elation was crushed the following morning when the police visited him regarding his visit to the Brady's home the previous evening. It was obvious that, in spite of proving his innocence regarding the muggings, it cut no ice with Mr. Brady.

Jeff still continued to see Tracy during the day whenever he could...usually during her lunch breaks. Once or twice he managed to see her on an evening. Louise covered for her friend by phoning the Bradys and asking if Tracy could come over. Mr. Brady drove her to Louise's and Jeff called at the door once he was gone.

On one occasion they were together on a lunch break. One of Tracy's classmates who had been ditched by Jeff sought her revenge by informing Mr. Brady. Stan responded by turning up at the school the following day along with his two brothers and a cousin. They lay in wait.

Ten minutes before school was due to close, Jeff arrived at the gates and was immediately seized by the two brothers. They forced him into an alley where all four men gave him a good beating.

"I *warned* you to keep away from my daughter, you bastard!" Stan snarled. "If you continue to see her, you will get twice the beating. Understand?"

Having seen that Tracy's father was involved, Jeff made no attempt to fight back but merely attempted to defend himself.

As Tracy arrived at the gate, she was dismayed to see that Jeff wasn't in his usual place. She waited fifteen minutes for him to arrive, unaware that, not far away, he was laying semiconscious, bleeding and bruised.

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The gang members believed that a rival gang had been responsible when they saw the state of their leader and they were all set for a rumble with the responsible party. Jeff, however, refused to give any information about who had worked him over and merely said that it was a personal matter.

It was a week before he got to see Tracy again. He was still carrying some marks and bruises on his face.

"JEFF! Where have you been? I was beginning to think that you ditched me. You haven't, have you?"

"No way. I told you, there's no way I'm going to lose you, Baby...not ever. You and I were meant for each other and I love you."

Tracy ran to embrace him and then noticed the bruises. "Jeff! Just look at you. You...you've been fighting again, haven't you? Oh Jeff, you promised me that you wouldn't!"

"I haven't, honest. I had an accident, that's all. I promise I didn't fight with anyone...honest."

Tracy was far from believing him but she had missed him so much that she let it drop; she was just relieved he hadn't dumped her for someone else.

"Jeff...Darling," she began, looking up into his smoldering brown eyes. "You know what you said about our sleeping together when the time was right? Well, it's right for me now. I love you and I want to prove it to you."

Jeff looked troubled. "I...I don't know, Trace. I mean, all this trouble with your folks as well as this restraining order keeping me from you. Shouldn't we try and smooth things out with your folks first? I'm still hoping they'll see that I've kept my nose clean and that my intentions towards you are entirely honorable."

"We've tried our best, haven't we? If you love me Jeff, I mean *really* love me, then you'll prove it. I want you, Darling. Listen, I'm at Louise's tonight...supposedly studying. Her parents are going to be out so we can be alone. Lou will understand and give us some space. Be there."

With that, Tracy gave Jeff a warm, passionate kiss on his lips, then departed.

This was all uncharted waters for Jeff. He never before had turned down a chance to hop into the sack with a girl. But Tracy was different. He didn't really want to sleep with her just yet; he wanted her to be different from the rest, for it to be special and right between them. What was happening to him?

Nevertheless, he turned up at Louise's house that evening, if for no other reason than it was an opportunity for them to be together, to be able to kiss and cuddle with her. He would not press going to bed with her.

"Hey, listen," he began, excitedly. "I didn't tell you this afternoon, I got a job since I last saw you. I start on Monday. Maybe *that* will prove to your ol' man that I ain't a good for nothin' bum. I'm plannin' to save the money for our future. If I can show your Dad that I have both a job an' some money, maybe he'll start to like me."

"Jeff, that's really cool! When did you get the job?"

"Day before yesterday. I start on Monday, so wish me luck, Kiddo."

"I'll give you a big lucky kiss," Tracy responded with a grin as she pressed her lips against Jeff's. Quickly, the kiss became more passionate and before long, Jeff could no longer control his ardor. He really *did* love Tracy and he had been longing to make love to her. Now he could hold back no longer. In no time at all they had made their way to Louise's parent's bedroom.

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Jeff held Tracy's beautiful, soft body tenderly. They made love twice that evening. If he ever had any doubts before, he knew now that he really loved the young girl he was laying with. No girl had ever made him feel the way that she had.

"Come on, Trace, we'd better be up and outta here or your Dad will be wonderin' where you are."

Tracy pressed her warm, tender young body closer to Jeff's. he melted as he felt her body heat. "Let's just stay a lit longer laying together like this," she begged.

"Damn, Tracy, don't. We can't. I would lay here with you forever more if I could, but your Dad's gonna be lookin' for you if he turns up an' your not ready downstairs. Anyway, your friend's parents may return and catch us together. We *really* ought to be movin'."

Reluctantly, Tracy got up and began dressing. The two lovers held one last passionate clinch before they departed from the bedroom.

"Thanks, Lou," Tracy said to her friend when they arrived downstairs. "I really appreciate this, I owe you one, Okay?"

"Don't mention it. Maybe we can arrange for you guys to get together again another evening soon," Louise replied with a smile. She was thinking how lucky her friend was. She wished it could have been her upstairs with the handsome hunk.

Jeff went over to her and gave her a kiss on the cheek. "Hey, like Trace said, we owe you one, man. Listen, when I get started on this job we're takin' you out, okay? You're a good friend, Lou. I won't forget it."

Louise left the two at the door and went back indoors, holding her cheek with a smile on her face.

The lovers kissed again before Jeff left and her dad turned up. "You aren't going to dump me now that you've slept with me, are you, Jeff?" Tracy asked solemnly.

Jeff looked at her in surprise. "What the hell gives you *that* idea?" he asked.

"Nothing, forget it. It's just that some of the girls at school were saying that as soon as you'd got a girl into bed, you ditched them."

"Did they? Well that may have been so, until I met you. You gotta believe I care for you. It was *your* idea to go upstairs, remember? If you believe enough in me, then maybe your folks will come around, too."

"I believe you, Jeff. So, when do we see each other again? I hope it isn't going to be a week like last time."

Jeff held Tracy tenderly by her shoulders and looked into her eyes. "I'd see you tomorrow and every day after if I could, but for now we gotta play things cool. Anyway, I got this job so I have to be at my best for the first few days till I settle in. Know what I mean? But I'll get messages to you."

They kissed one last time, then Jeff set off down the alley. Two minutes later, Stan drove up in his car.

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The two lovers didn't see each other for the next few days. Tracy concentrated on her schooling and Jeff began his new job. Working for a living was something new to the young man but determination kept him at it. He was a totally changed person since he met Tracy and he was determined to put some honest money together for their future. He was equally determined to prove his doubters wrong and prove his love for Tracy.

By Thursday, Jeff's fourth day of working, he was at a Cafe with some of his friends. He was missing Tracy badly and couldn't get their evening together out of his mind. He had never felt so fulfilled after sex.

"So, how's the work coming along for you?"

"UH, what?" Jeff's thoughts were interrupted as he realized that Baz was talking to him.

"I was askin' about your job, man. Gee, you just ain't with it no more. That gal of yours has got you hooked."

"Yeah man, you ain't no fun no more. You're supposed to be our leader, man," Del joined in the protest.

"We ain't even pulled a job for a couple of weeks," complained Rick.

"Get offa my case, all of you. I ain't stoppin' you from doin' anythin'. If you wanna make jerks out of yourselves an' get arrested, go ahead and do it. I ain't stoppin' you."

"The boys don't mean it like that," Eddie stepped in. "But you're the one who plans things for us, the one we all look up to. It's gettin' mighty dull just hangin' around here."

"Fine, Eddie, then pick a new leader, man. I quit. I recommend you for takin' over the Abbotts."

"You don't mean that, Jeff," Sheila commented. "Come on, none of these apes can run this outfit like *you* do. Forget that doll of yours an' get back with your real friends." With that, Sheila sidled up to Jeff and put her arms around him.

"Cut it out, Sheila," Jeff demanded as he shoved her off.

"Geez man, you *really* ain't no fun anymore," Sheila stormed in offended tones.

"Come on, I'm outta here an' lookin' for some action. Anyone with me?" Baz asked as he rose from the table. Most of the gang vacated their seats with him and made their way to the door leaving Jeff, Al and four of the girls still sitting.

"You really *are* stuck on that gal, ain't ya?" One of the four girls asked, looking at him sympathetically.

"I guess so, Brenda. I've never felt like this before about anyone. Don't take it wrong, Bren. I mean, you were great, it's just that, well, I don't know. I really feel like she's the one for me, you know?"

"Boy, you really *have* changed! I can't remember you ever tellin' me that you an' I were great together. If you had to get lovesick over some doll, why couldn't it have been me?" she asked wishfully. "Seriously though, Jeff, anything I can do to help out?"

"Nah, not really. My main problem is with her folks. Her ol' man thinks he's got me all worked out and won't let me within a mile of her. Her friend Louise has let us meet at her house but we can only do that when her parents go out, which ain't too often."

"You can come to my pad if ya like. My Mom's so wrapped up in her new boyfriend that she's out most of the time."

"Could we do that, Bren? That would be great."

"I live down by her school. I'll see her tomorrow and pass on a message for you to see her at Bren's. If she can work it out with that friend of hers to say she's goin' there, it'll give you guys a chance to be together," Josie offered.

"An' my folks go out every Saturday if ever Brenda can't let you in her house. You're welcome to go there, we can get some beer an' have ourselves a party," Al suggested.

"Yeah, thanks Al, but I don't think Trace ought to go back home smellin' of booze, do you ? But really, thanks all you guys for your help."

"Don't mention it. The Black Abbotts look out for one another, right? Even the girl members," Josie told him.

"Right," replied Jeff. "I guess I didn't appreciate you girl members enough in the past."

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Through the girl members of the gang, Jeff and Tracy managed to see more of each another, sometimes with some of the gang present; other times they were left alone to be more intimate.

Jeff's new job was going well and his bank balance was starting to increase. After six weeks of work, he mailed his pay slips to Tracy's dad with a letter telling him how he was keeping out of trouble and how he was working hard for a living now.

"Tracy, do you know about this?" Stan asked his daughter as he waved the letter in the air.

"What is it, Daddy?" Tracy asked coming to see what he was holding.

"It's a letter from that mobster you've been seeing. Did you know that he intended to write to me?"

"Er...yes, I did."

"Oh, so that means that you're still seeing him somehow, doesn't it? Perhaps you would care to tell me how?"

"But daddy, he's got a job now and he no longer gets involved with any kind of crime. The reason he's wrote is to try and make things right with you. Can't you just give him a chance to prove himself to you?"

"He already *has* proved himself in my eyes. Since we moved here, I've heard all kinds of things about him from the neighbors. Were you aware that he was locked up four times last year alone? Once for grievous bodily harm. Or that he had made two girls pregnant and they had to get abortions because they were still in school?"

"But he's changed, Dad. He's just been with the wrong people, that's all," Tracy protested.

"He did seem to be quite sincere when he called here, Stan. I thought he seemed quite nice," Pam added in support.

"What! He's been here again? Goddamn, this is turning into a conspiracy against me...and he's causing it. Can't either of you see I am trying desperately to protect our daughter from that leech? Tracy, you're grounded for defying me. I will not tolerate such behavior from you."

"Well you can't ground me for the rest of my life. I'm nearly old enough to make my own decisions. Then I'll see who I want to see," Tracy responded.

"Do you see what he is doing to her, Pam ? He is turning our daughter against us, getting her to go against our authority. Well, I am not going to stand for it. Tracy, you are my daughter and while you are living under my roof, you will do as I say."

"Why won't you just give him a chance? I hate you," the young girl responded as she burst into tears. Stan looked hurt at her remark.

"Can't you see, Sweetheart, I'm trying to protect you. Can't you see that he is only after one thing? As soon as he gets you into bed, he'll drop you like a hot coal. I've heard this about him from other people, I don't want you getting hu..."

"Well that just shows where you're wrong then," Tracy cut in. "Because he didn't."

"Tracy, what do you mean, 'he didn't'?" Stan asked in concern. "Tracy, I asked you a question. What do you mean? Have you slept with him?"

Tracy realized that she had said too much and didn't reply but the expression on her face said it all.

"That's it!" Stan stormed. "I've had enough. He's already had a beating and he still hasn't learned his lesson."

"What?" Tracy mumbled in confusion. "Oh my God! The other week...when Jeff was all cut...it was *you*, wasn't it?"

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Jeff was awakened from his sleep early in the morning by a loud knocking on his door. He could hear his Dad grumble in the next bedroom as he went to answer it. Getting out of bed, Jeff threw on some clothes and went to see who it could be.

"You stay in bed, Dad, I'll get it," he called as he made his way downstairs.

"It'd better not be no more trouble, ya hear?" His father called back.

Downstairs, Jeff began to unlock the door and found two patrol officers, shining flashlights into his face.

"Good morning, sir. Are you a...Mr. Jeffrey Bennett?"

"Yeah, that's me. What's this all about?"

"Er, you had a protection order served upon you on the...13th of last month, is that right? Preventing you from seeing a Miss Tracy Jennifer Brady?"

Jeff nodded.

"Well, sir, we have been informed that you have violated that order. I must ask you to come down to the station with us to answer charges."

Amidst the confusion, Jeff's father came to the top of the landing and shouted down the stairs. "If that's the police again, don't bother comin' back home again Jeff, ya hear? I warned you about constantly bringing trouble to this door."

Jeff was unable to reply as he found himself being escorted by the two officers, his hands cuffed behind his back.

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It was at the first light of morning that Jeff found his way back home, feeling tired and fed up with everything. It didn't help his mood when he found most of his belongings bundled up by the rear door.

Jeff began to knock loudly on the door; he wanted an explanation. After a while, his father came down the stairs and unlocked it.

"What's goin' on, Dad? What's all my stuff doin' outside?" he asked.

"I warned you," his Dad shouted, annoyed at being disturbed from sleep twice in the same night. "I said that if you brought the police back to my door one more time that you'd be outta here. I wasn't jokin'."

"But Dad, it's not like that, man. I haven't pulled a job or nothin', I ain't even broken the law...really. It's just about this girl I've been seein'."

"A girl. I might've known. Save it, Jeffrey," Mr. Bennett cut him off. "You, you bastard, always gettin' some poor broad into trouble. You treat 'em like dirt. You ain't no son of mine."

"No Dad...listen, you got it all wrong, I really respect this one, in fact, I lo..."

"Spare me the details. Just tell me, have you been arrested or not?" Mr Bennett asked, cutting Jeff off.

"Well, yeah, but..."

"That's all I want to know. Get outta here. I'm tired and I've had it with you."

"Can't I stay till I get someplace?" Jeff pleaded.

"No, you gotta learn, you can't just keep treatin' people like you do," his Dad replied without remorse.

"What about my stuff? I can't go haulin' all that about with me. Can I leave it here till I get fixed up someplace?"

Mr. Bennett thought for a moment. "I guess you can leave your things in the garage...but I want them out within a week or I'll have them removed."

Jeff knew his Dad. It was pointless to try and persuade him to allow him to stay. He began to walk off despondently, tired and miserable. What else could go wrong? He had never had problems like this concerning girls before. He treated them like shit in the past, he admitted, but there had never been any problems before. Was this new girl worth all the trouble? Was she *that* special? As he walked along, he pictured her smiling face; he could almost taste her soft, sweet lips on his own. Yeah, she was special...*very* special.

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By the time Jeff arrived at his place of work later that morning he was over an hour late and fit to drop. Due to his lack of sleep, he made several errors as fatigue took over him. His new boss eventually intervened to ask what was wrong.

Far from being sympathetic, his boss ripped Jeff for being late and for his lack of attention to the job. Jeff tried to explain how he had been kicked out of his house by his father and had spent much of the night at the police station.

"So far you've been doing a good job here, Bennett. Up until now, your work and your time-keeping have been very good," his boss told him. "I don't care particularly what reason it was that you were taken down to the police station. I'm more concerned about this place running smoothly and the work being turned out. I don't want any disruptions, not from you or anyone else, you hear? Now, get your private life sorted out or I will be forced to let you go."

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"So when are you up before the court, Jeff?" Baz asked as the gang assembled at the local cafe.

"A week from Friday," Jeff answered solemnly.

"That's a real bummer, man. You try goin' straight and you still get your ass hauled in front of the court," Col added.

"So where you got in mind to live?" Eddie inquired as he put an unlit cigarette into his mouth, offering Jeff one as he did.

"Don't really know. I'm gonna look around for some digs."

"But what about tonight? Where you gonna sleep? I mean, you ain't got no place yet, have you?" Sheila asked.

"Tonight's no problem. You can shack up at my place...for a few nights even. I'm sure my folks won't mind," Eddie offered as he leaned across with his lighter so that Jeff could ignite his cigarette. "Tomorrow we can all scout around and find a place for you."

"Hey man, that'd be swell if I could ditch with you a couple of nights. Thanks, Eddie, thanks all of ya."

"Jeff, we're all in this thing with you, you know? Anything we can do to help you, just holler," Sheila told him.

"You're all good buddies. What I really need to do right now, though, is get a message to Tracy, let her know what's happened."

At the mention of Tracy's name, Sheila's friendly smile vanished. "You mean to say you're *still* gonna see her after all this? Jeff, honey, it's all her family's fault that you're in this crap," she told him.

"Yeah, her *family's* fault, not *hers*. She ain't done nothin' wrong and as far as I'm concerned, she's worth it. I love her."

One or two of the gang exchanged glances with each other; they'd never heard Jeff talk that way before. "Boy, you *must*," Sheila said under her breath.

"Don't worry, I'll get you a message to her," Josie offered. "Then, when you get that pad of your own, you guys'll be able to see each other all the time."

"Perhaps, if her old man ever lets her out of the house," Jeff sighed.

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Eddie had no trouble persuading his Mom and Dad to let Jeff spend a few nights at his house. Within forty-eight hours, the girls of the gang had found an apartment for him.

The rent was fairly steep and the landlord wanted a months deposit, which Jeff was able to take out from his bank account. It made a hole in his savings but at least now he had somewhere to live and to see Tracy. That same evening, some of the gang helped Jeff collect his personal belongings from his Dad's house and move them to the apartment.

Josie managed to catch Tracy just as she was leaving school the following day but she didn't have long to speak to her as Stan was now in the habit of driving her to and from school. Stan thought the girl gang member was just one of Tracy's school friends as he waited for her in the car.

Tracy, of course, had no idea that Jeff had been arrested. She was both saddened and angry at the news and could hardly wait to see Jeff again. For the moment, though, there was nothing that she could do. Her father had made it a personal vendetta and there was no point to fanning the flames.

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"She said for me to say she loves you and is dying to see you again as soon as possible."

"Thanks Josie, you done good. Damn, what's eatin' that guy? I never did nothin' to hurt him. I've heard of protective parents before but geeze, he's unbelievable. I've done everything I know to try and get on the right side of him."

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For the time being, Jeff absorbed himself in his job and hung out with the gang, keeping out of trouble while desperately missing Tracy. Hardly any time had passed before he was up in front of court to answer the charges brought against him.

Even the judge seemed to be against him. He fined Jeff a considerable sum of money while warning him that if he broke the injunction again he would be put in jail for a month.

The fine took practically all the money that Jeff had managed to accumulate for his and Tracy's future together. He was left devastated. It didn't help to improve his mood when his boss insisted that he worked overtime to make up for the time he had lost while at court.