

the first time I met Terry

by Jerry Ratch

I remember the first time I met Terry. She was in the back seat of an old Plymouth convertible with its top down, jam-packed with raucous high school girls vying to see which one of them could be the most loud and obnoxious, and which capable of the most outrageous behavior. The back of that old car fairly bounced with their combined, explosive energy. A young guy named Joey from the neighborhood, who worked in my dad's gas station, but with no taste whatsoever in women except in the way of quantity, pulled in with this carload of what I thought of at first as noisy white trash, and I remember gawking especially at Terry.

She stood right up on the back seat cussing a blue streak, louder than the rest, dressed in a sleeveless orange tank-top and tight cut-off Levi's, standing out of the crowd like a gaudy rooster, and I thought: *"Now, who the hell is this loud, foul-mouthed piece of work?"* Except that she also had an allure, and a certain confidence and possession, swaying out of the car like a tall, bright flower, somehow completely assured of her footing. But she always worried me because when you first encountered her, she could be such a loud and abrasive creature, and she behaved in such an exaggerated, purposefully crazy manner, that I imagined she thought that was the only way to attract attention to herself in a loud, direct city like Chicago.

They pulled up to the pumps for gas. Joey was getting set to take the whole gang of girls down to the Lake at North Avenue beach. I came out from the garage, wiping my hands. I remember her looking at me like: *Now what the hell do we have here?*

I was tall and skinny, with a brown mustache and a little goatee. She'd never known anybody who wore a goatee. Everybody thought only beatniks wore them, but this guy was no beatnik. He was just a college boy, wearing what college boys wore at the time. I was tanned just like my dad, from being out in the sun all summer.

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This was because we had a ski boat out on Fox River, which was about forty miles west of Chicago. You'd go right out straight west on North Avenue until it became a highway out there, beyond this town we lived in called Villa Park. That was only twenty miles out, but it was way out in the damned boonies to these city girls.

I put the hose in the tank and opened the hood of the car to see about the oil under there. That's when Terry hopped out of the back seat to check me out.

"Ay, caramba, this boy's got some ass!" she yelled to the girls. She wanted to keep the party going. They were having a ball until I stepped into the picture. I could see every one of her girlfriends checking me out. This other girl named Stefanie opened up her blouse even more than it already was, letting her cleavage spill out all over the place. She kept leaning forward, and directing herself like a heavy sunflower toward wherever it was that I was walking around the front of the car.

Terry poked her nose in under the hood while I was checking the oil.

"Whatchya doing under there, college boy?"

"The name is Jerry," I said.

She looked at me, and something stopped her. I sort of looked inside her. It was like I was looking right in and I could take whatever I wanted (even though I was seeing Sharon almost every night at the time.) Something about me made her tone it down a notch. Maybe that I wasn't impressed by all the noise. This was the way they normally got attention in the neighborhood. She stuck out her hand. "I'm Terry," she said. "Want to come down to the beach with us?"

"I can't. I'm working."

"Listen, college boy, I don't ask nobody twice. I know your dad runs this place, and you can take off any time you want."

I looked right at her stomach muscles, then stood up tall and straight, looking her up and down. Terry got flushed all over, as if I had hands in my eyes.

"Aren't you jail bait?" I asked.

"I'm just about seventeen. But I'm old for my age."

I let out a laugh. There was something about this girl, I don't know.

"I get off work at nine," I said. "Come by, and we'll go for a ride in my car."

"What kind of car you got, college boy? *An Edsel?*" She said this real loud, so all her girlfriends could hear. They hooted when they heard Terry saying that.

I simply pointed over toward my car. It was stunning. It was a gleaming white over silverpine-green, souped-up '55 Chevy that looked so sleek and cool and fast that they couldn't take their eyes off it.

"What you got in it?" As if she knew anything.

"A 327, three deuces and a four speed, positraction 411 rear-end, and cheater slicks."

Joey started up the motor on his Plymouth jalopy, and everybody yelled for Terry to pile into the back seat.

"Sure you don't want to come with us down to the beach at North Avenue? I don't ask nobody twice, college boy."

"That's the second time you asked."

"See you," she said. "We're outta here." She slapped her stomach muscles hard and waved, blowing kisses as they pulled on out of there, with Joey's tires squealing under the viaduct where the railroad tracks ran overhead.

Terry showed up at the gas station at nine o'clock on the dot that night — and that was when the rest of our lives began. We got into my souped-up car, but never even made it out from behind my dad's garage. We started to neck, and made out for two hours straight. I never got so hot in my life. Could that girl ever kiss! She must have explored every inch, I mean every inch, of my body. She couldn't keep her hands off me. She told me she never realized that thing on a man could get so big, and she was sopping wet inside her jeans. We reached a point where we both knew we'd better pull back, or it would be all over for her, and she would have to go confess something really big.

