

RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



The Feud

Kimberley Chambers

Contents

About the Book

About the Author

Also by Kimberley Chambers

Title Page

Dedication

Epigraph

Acknowledgements

Prologue

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Chapter Six

Chapter Seven

Chapter Eight

Chapter Nine

Chapter Ten

Chapter Eleven

Chapter Twelve

Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Sixteen

Chapter Seventeen

Chapter Eighteen
Chapter Nineteen
Chapter Twenty
Chapter Twenty-One
Chapter Twenty-Two
Chapter Twenty-Three
Chapter Twenty-Four
Chapter Twenty-Five
Chapter Twenty-Six
Chapter Twenty-Seven
Chapter Twenty-Eight
Chapter Twenty-Nine
Chapter Thirty
Chapter Thirty-One
Chapter Thirty-Two
Chapter Thirty-Three
Chapter Thirty-Four
Chapter Thirty-Five
Chapter Thirty-Six
Chapter Thirty-Seven
Chapter Thirty-Eight
Chapter Thirty-Nine
Chapter Forty
Chapter Forty-One
Chapter Forty-Two
Chapter Forty-Three

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About the Book

For more than a decade two East End families have been locked in a bitter war.

On one side are the Mitchells, a notorious underworld mob from East London's Canning Town. They have an iron in every fire and will resort to intimidation and violence to get what they want. When Stanley Smith's lovely young daughter, Jessica, announces that she is to marry Eddie, the son of mob boss Harry Mitchell, Stanley is horrified, but too afraid to stand in their way.

On the other side are the O'Haras. The Mitchells' biggest rivals are a travelling family who live in nearby Stratford. They compete with the Mitchells for pub protection and the two families hate each other.

Caught between these two families at war, are two innocent children, who will grow up to love the wrong people and spark the last terrible act in the long-running feud. 1988 was a happy year in many people's lives. Some called it The Rave Year, others The Second Summer of Love. For Eddie Mitchell and his family it is neither. 1988 is the year in which his whole dangerous, violent world explodes around him.

About the Author

Kimberley Chambers lives in Romford and has been, at various times, a disc jockey and a street trader. She is the author of *Billie Jo*, *Born Evil* and *The Betrayer* and is currently working on her fifth book.

Also by Kimberley Chambers

Billie Jo
Born Evil
The Betrayer

The Feud

Kimberley Chambers



In memory of Lee Mouser
1962-2002

My daddy told me I never should
Play with the gypsies in the wood

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And last, but certainly not least, I must acknowledge Chas and Dave. Gutted you split up boys, but your music will live forever!

PROLOGUE

Summer 1970

AS EDDIE MITCHELL ran his fingers along the side of the baseball bat, he could feel the beads of sweat forming along his forehead. It was one of those muggy days, where flying ants appeared. It was far too hot to be suited and booted and stuck in the back of a Transit van.

Eddie listened intently as his father repeated his instructions. 'We don't want an all-out war, so nothing too heavy, boys. This is a little warning for 'em, and if they don't get the message, then heavy'll come later.'

As the rest of the family discussed the feud, Eddie sat in silence. In his eyes, the O'Haras had taken a fucking liberty and deserved more than a little warning. For as long as Ed could remember, his dad, Harry, had run the pub protection racket in the East End. No one messed with the Mitchells, no one dared, and then, like an unwanted disease, the O'Haras appeared on the scene and tried to muscle in on their patch. Eddie was the youngest member of the family firm. His dad ran the show, along with his uncle Reg. Then there were Paulie and Ronny, his two elder brothers.

'You OK, son?'

Smiling with anticipation, Eddie nodded at his father. The O'Haras were a travelling family who had recently moved to the East End from Cambridgeshire. Eddie hated travellers. In his eyes, they were uncouth, lowlife, inbred scum. In particular, he hated Jimmy O'Hara. He was the strongest of the sons, the loudest, and flash didn't even begin to describe him.

'I wanna be the one to take out Jimmy, Dad.'

Harry eyed his son proudly. Even from an early age, Eddie was the one full of promise, and Harry knew without a doubt that one day his youngest child would be head of the family business.

As the Transit van pulled up outside the pub, the Mitchells clutched their weapons.

'Right, let's do it,' Harry said as he sprang from the van.

Barging his brothers and uncle out of the way, Ed followed his father into the boozier. 'See you? You're dead, you piss-taking pikey cunt,' he screamed as he spotted Jimmy O'Hara and lunged towards him.

As the pub erupted into full-scale mayhem, Eddie was grabbed around the neck from behind.

'Do him, Jimmy, fucking do him!' he heard a voice shout.

As the knife slid down the left-hand side of his face, Eddie felt anger, not pain. With blood spewing from his face, he went for O'Hara like a rabid Rottweiler.

'You inbred pikey piece of shit!' he screamed, as he threw off the geezer behind him and repeatedly thrust the baseball bat against Jimmy O'Hara's head.

In that moment, Eddie completely lost it, and if his family hadn't dragged him away, Ed swore he would have committed murder.

Harry, Reg, Paulie and Ronny managed to clump and scare the rest of the O'Haras and, aware that Eddie's face was almost sliced in two, they quickly bundled him into the back of the Transit van.

'Let me go back. I'll kill him, I'll fucking kill him!' Eddie screamed.

'Your face is fucked. We need to get you stitched up, son,' Harry said seriously.

Ed was seething as he held the side of his face together. He was covered in claret from head to toe. The wound was so deep, it had even soaked through his suit.

Aware that his mouth was full of blood, Ed spat a mouthful onto the floor. As he turned to his father, his expression blackened.

'I'll get me own back, Dad, if it's the last thing I do. Even if the O'Haras lay off our turf, this feud ain't over. It will never be over between me and Jimmy, not now - not ever.'

ONE

1971

JOYCE SMITH SMILED as she carefully lifted her best dinner service out of the box. She rarely used her expensive china, but today was a very special occasion and she was desperate to impress.

As Joyce entered the living room, her smile immediately turned to a frown. That lazy husband of hers was still glued to that filthy, stinking armchair of his. 'Stanley, get your arse up them stairs and get yourself ready. You haven't even washed or shaved yet and they'll be here soon.'

More interested in the 3.45 at Kempton, Stanley leaped up and down. 'Go on my son, get in there. Go on my son, you can do it!'

As his horse got pipped at the post, Stanley threw the *Sporting Life* up in the air in temper. 'Stupid, bastard nag!' he shouted.

Annoyed that her husband was ignoring her orders, Joyce picked up her broom and clumped him on the head with it. Why he betted, she'd never know. He always bloody lost. 'I won't tell you again, Stanley. Now get up them bleedin' stairs and smarten yourself up.'

Stanley knew better than to argue with his wife. She wore the trousers, and he just complied with her orders.

'Your nice blue shirt and best slacks are hanging on the wardrobe door; put them on,' Joyce ordered.

'Anyone would think the Queen Mother was coming for tea,' Stan replied, as he ran up the stairs.

Picking up the duster and polish, Joyce did her best to tidy his dirty little corner. She had a quick vac round then, to finish, sprayed a whole can of air freshener around the house. That's better, she thought as she studied her domain.

Joyce was very proud of her three-bedroomed council house. It was situated in a road off Upney Lane, but she always told people that she lived in the upper-class part of Barking. Obviously, she would have liked to have bought a private property in a better area, but on Stan's bus driver's wages, that was never going to happen.

A proper little homemaker, Joyce was always buying new ornaments and furniture to tart up her surroundings. Her neighbours all said that she had the poshest house in the street and Joyce loved the compliment. Being known as the posh woman suited her down to the ground.

Stanley mumbled and cursed to himself as he shaved and got changed. Not only was he annoyed with the jockey and nag that had just lost him money, he was also annoyed with his daughter, Jessica, for messing up his usual plans.

Apart from the one in four Saturdays when he had to work, Stanley loved these afternoons. They were like his day out of prison, when he'd escape Joycie's moaning and spend the whole day in the pub or the bookie's with his pals. Today, he wasn't allowed to go anywhere. His daughter, Jessica, was bringing this new boyfriend of hers around for tea and Joyce had insisted he stay indoors and play happy families.

Like most dads, Stanley was quite protective of his only daughter. Jessica was only seventeen and still lived at home with them. Petite and blonde, Jessica was a very pretty girl with a sunny nature. She'd had boyfriends in the past, but there'd been nothing serious until this latest one.

His son, Raymond, was forever bringing different girls home, but Stan wasn't worried about what he got up to. With Jess it was different. He knew what it was like to be a

hormonal young man and he would hate anyone taking advantage of his little girl.

Stan checked his appearance in the mirror. From what Joyce had said, this new boyfriend sounded like a right Flash Harry. Call it father's intuition, Stanley just knew he wasn't going to like him very much.

Joyce stared out of the window as she plumped up the cushions. They should be here any minute and she couldn't wait to meet this Eddie. For the first time in her young life, Jessica had fallen hook, line and sinker and Joyce was ever so pleased for her. Joyce's own life had always lacked excitement and romance, and she wanted her daughter to have everything she hadn't. Sometimes she wondered why she'd even married Stan and then she remembered her mother's harsh words: 'You're twenty-two now, Joycie. Look at all your mates, every one of them married. Even that fat Doreen from across the road has found herself a husband. Young Stanley's from ever such good stock. I know all of his family, even his aunts and uncles. You don't wanna be left on the shelf, do you now?'

'But I don't think I love him, Mum,' Joyce complained.

'Well, it's up to you, Joycie. I wasn't in love with your father when I married him, but we made the most of it. Love comes later, dear. Take my advice and marry Stanley. If you say no and leave it any longer, at your age there'll be little else to choose from.'

Six months after that little chat, Joyce reluctantly agreed to marry Stanley. Jessica arrived a year later, closely followed by Raymond. Love between her and Stan had never really blossomed, but Joyce threw herself into the children and in her own way was happy with her little lot. Romeo and Juliet, she and Stan most certainly weren't, but they jogged along quite nicely, especially since he'd stopped wanting sex.

Joyce loved reading and what was lacking in her love life she found in the pages of Mills & Boon novels. Now she

hoped that Jessica and her new beau would fill a void in her life and inject some much-needed romance.

Seeing her clean-shaven husband walk towards her, Joyce smiled at him. 'That's better! What a difference to see you in a nice shirt and slacks. See Stanley, you do scrub up well when you try.'

Stan tutted and flopped in his armchair. 'Scrub up well! I feel like a bleedin' pox doctor's clerk,' he moaned.

Joyce shooed him out of his chair. 'They're due in five minutes. Stand up, or you'll crease your shirt.'

Stan jumped up as though he had a firework up his arse. He wasn't the bravest man in the world and over the years he'd realised that it was easier to comply with Joycie's orders than to argue with her.

'Where's Raymond?' he asked.

Twitching the curtain, Joyce explained. 'Gone round his mate's. I told him not to come back until later. He's been a cheeky little sod lately and, as for that racket he keeps playing upstairs, I didn't want him to give a bad impression of us in front of Eddie. Quick, here they are, this is them. I'll answer the door, you go and get some beers out the shed to offer Eddie. Now, Stanley. Quick, chop-chop.'

As they approached the house, Jessica squeezed Eddie's big hand. Clocking Ginny and Linda staring at her from the house across the road, she waved proudly. Jessica couldn't stop grinning. To say Eddie was a looker was an understatement. The expression tall, dark and handsome could have been created just for him. She was dying for her parents to meet him, especially her mum. The only worry she had was the age gap between them. Eddie was thirty but she had told her dad he was only twenty-five. Her mum knew the truth and once her dad got to know Eddie and like him, she would tell him the truth as well.

'This is it, number eleven. Now, remember what I told you about my dad. He still thinks of me as his little baby, so if he's not overly friendly, please don't take it personally.'

Eddie kissed her on the nose. 'You worry too much, Jess. I'll have a chat with your old man, just leave him to me.'

Unable to contain her excitement any longer, Joyce flung open the front door.

'Ed, this is my mum. Mum, this is Eddie,' Jessica said, beaming.

Eddie shook Joyce's hand and politely kissed her on both cheeks. 'It's a delight to meet you, Mrs Smith. Your Jessica's told me so much about you.'

Joyce giggled. 'All good, I hope?'

'Most definitely,' Eddie said, winking.

Joyce led them into the living room. 'We'll have a nice cup of tea, Jess, and let the men have a beer,' she said.

Jessica smiled as she noticed her mother had got the expensive china out. 'Where's Dad?' she asked.

Joyce offered Eddie a sandwich. 'Gone down to the shed to get some beers. Speak of the devil - here he is now.'

Eddie put his sandwich down and stood up as Stan entered the room. 'Dad, this is Eddie who I've been telling you about,' Jessica said nervously.

At five feet eight inches tall, Stanley felt inadequate as he shook Eddie's strong hand. He thought of the jockey who had lost him the race earlier and, for some reason, felt like his twin brother.

'Would you like a piece of homemade fruit cake, Eddie?' his wife asked.

Stan flopped into his armchair and studied the object of his daughter's affection. He'd been right all along. He didn't like the look of him one little bit. Jessica had told him that Eddie was twenty-five, but the bastard looked old enough to be her dad. He was broad-shouldered, with dark hair and was wearing tailored grey trousers with a long black Crombie coat. As he turned his head, Stan noticed the massive scar that ran from the outside of his left eye to the corner of his mouth. Stan knocked back his bottle of Double Diamond and opened another. Eddie looked an out-and-out

villain. He certainly wasn't the sort of chap he envisaged or wanted his beautiful daughter going out with.

As the conversation flowed, Stan could tell that Mr Fucking Charming Bollocks had Joycie eating out of his hand.

'That fruit cake was amazing, Mrs Smith. So much better than the cakes I'm used to,' the smarmy bastard said.

'You're ever so quiet, Dad. Are you OK?' Jessica asked, as she handed him and Eddie another beer.

Knowing that he was expected to join in the conversation, Stanley cleared his throat. 'Jessica said that she met you at a local party. Do you come from round here, Eddie?'

'No. My family are out of Canning Town and I live up that way. I share a flat with me brother, Ronny. It's nothing special, we live above a pet shop along the Barking Road.'

Stanley carried on prying. 'And what do you do for a living? If you don't mind me asking?'

Eddie smiled. The old boy didn't like him, he could sense it a mile off. 'My dad owns a load of salvage yards. He's retired now, so me and my brothers run them for him.'

Stanley felt fear wash over him. Canning Town? Salvage yards? Surely he wasn't one of the Mitchell boys - please God, no.

Dreading the answer, it took Stan a while to pluck up the courage to ask the all-important question. 'Before I met Joycie, I used to live in Canning Town myself. I remember a lot of the old school. What's your father's name?'

Eddie smirked. 'Harry Mitchell. You probably know him, most people do.'

Stanley took a large gulp of his drink and started to choke. Unable to breathe properly, he fell off the chair and onto all fours.

Aware of her husband going redder and redder in the face, Joyce stood up and repeatedly thumped him on the back. Embarrassed that he'd made a show of her in front of Eddie, she tried to make a joke of it. 'He spends so much time watching them bleedin' horses on telly, he's started to

behave like one now. Giddy up, giddy up,' she said, laughing.

Feeling as though he was about to have a heart attack, Stan managed to heave himself up and stand on two feet. 'Went down the wrong hole,' he gasped, as he legged it from the room.

Joyce smiled at Eddie. 'You'll have to excuse my Stanley. He's not used to having visitors, but he's a good man deep down, and once you get to know him, I'm sure you'll like him.'

Eddie grinned. He doubted that very much. 'I'm sure we'll get on like a house on fire, Mrs Smith. Now, is there any chance of having another piece of that wonderful fruit cake?'

Joyce beamed as she handed him a slice. What a charming chap, she thought.

Stanley sat in the shed and tried his best to compose himself. Canning Town had a notorious reputation for producing villainous families and they didn't come much worse than the Mitchells. Bootlegging, pub protection, illegal boxing. Rumour had it that over the years the bastards had had a finger in every pie going.

Stanley remembered Harry Mitchell as though it were yesterday. He'd been standing in a pub in East Ham having a drink with Roger Dodds, his old school pal. All of a sudden the door had burst open and the pub had fallen silent. A man in a suit and trilby hat walked towards them.

'Which one of you is Roger Dodds?' he'd asked menacingly.

Crapping himself, Stan had nodded towards his friend. Seconds later, Roger Dodds had his face slashed and his right eye taken out with a broken bottle.

The man in the trilby hat had then ordered a Scotch, downed it in one, apologised for any inconvenience and casually strolled out of the pub.

That man in the trilby was Harry Mitchell. Apparently, Dodds's father had fucked him over for a load of money and that was payback time.

Deep in thought, Stanley didn't hear the shed door creak open. It was Eddie. Stanley leaped up. 'What's going on? What do you want?' he asked nervously.

Eddie stared at him. 'Calm down, you'll give yourself a cardiac. The girls were worried about you. They said you'd be in the shed, so I thought I'd check you were OK.'

Stan nodded. 'I'm fine now. It took me a while to catch me breath, so I came out here for a sit down.'

Desperate for some fresh air, Stanley led Eddie away from the shed. He locked the door, then was horrified as he felt a massive arm go round his shoulder.

Eddie smiled. He could almost smell the old man's fright. 'Actually, I wanted to have a quiet word with you, man to man, like.'

Stan looked at him in horror. He'd only been dating Jessica for a month; surely he wasn't going to ask his permission to marry her.

Eddie stood in front of him and looked him straight in the eye. 'The thing is, Mr Smith, I think you should know that I'm really serious about your Jessica, so I wanna get a few things straight. I'm not twenty-five like Jess told you, I'm actually thirty years old. I've also been married in the past and I've got two little boys, Gary and Ricky, who I dote on. Obviously, they don't live with me - they live with my ex-wife, Beverley. I've been straight with Jess from the start and I think it's only right I do the same with you. As I said, things are moving pretty quickly between me and your Jess, so I just wanna know that you approve of our relationship.'

Dumbstruck, Stanley stood with his mouth open and was horrified as a fly flew in and hit the back of his throat. Half choking, he spat it out and ended up on his knees for the second time that day.

Eddie helped him up. 'So, are you OK about me and Jess?' he asked again.

Stanley nodded. 'No problem, Eddie, and thanks for telling me,' he mumbled.

'There you are,' Joyce said, as Stanley returned, ashen-faced.

The polite conversation carried on for another hour or so and was only stopped by Eddie giving Jessica a secret nudge. Jessica looked at her watch and stood up. 'God, is that the time! Mum, Dad, we best be going now. Eddie is taking me to the pictures tonight. We're going to see that new film, *Love Story*. All the girls at work reckon it's brilliant. I've been dying to see it and we don't want to miss the start.'

Eddie stood up and put his arm around his young girlfriend's shoulders. 'Mrs Smith, Mr Smith, thank you so much for your hospitality. It's been a pleasure to meet you both. Don't worry, I'll take good care of your Jessica and I promise to have her home by a reasonable hour.'

Overcome by the romance of it all, Joyce stood at the door waving them off. 'No snogging in the back row,' she giggled.

'Stop it, Mum,' Jessica said embarrassed.

Joyce shut the front door and sighed a happy sigh. What an attractive, polite chap. He was like one of them Mills & Boon men, sophisticated and handsome. Thrilled for her daughter, Joyce decided to have a G&T to celebrate.

'Well, what did you think?' she asked Stanley, as she sat back down.

Stanley said nothing. He was too frightened to voice his opinions, in case Joyce told Jessica and it got back to Eddie.

Joyce kicked off her shoes and put her slippers on. 'Did you see his shoes? He's definitely worth money. Look, I know it's hard for you, Stan, but Jess isn't a little baby any more. Most of my friends were married at her age. I want her to have the best in life and that Eddie's got class

stamped all over him. He's got lovely manners and he'll take good care of her, I know he will.'

Stanley cracked open another beer. He'd had the day from hell and all he wanted to do now was watch *Ironsides*. 'Do you mind if I watch the telly now? And if you're gonna keep on about it, no, I wasn't overkeen. In my opinion, Eddie's far too old for our Jess, and, no, I didn't notice his bloody shoes.'

Joyce laughed. 'I knew you had a hangup about him. I know he's a bit older than her, but you're such an old fuddy-duddy. I bet if she'd have brought Prince Charles home, you'd have found fault with him. You just won't let go of her, will you, Stan?'

For the next hour, Joyce wouldn't shut up. It was Eddie this and Eddie that.

Unusually for Stanley, he completely lost his rag. 'For Christ's sake, Joycie, I'm no man's fool. The bloke's a wrong 'un and I know it. He's thirty years old, a divorcee with two bloody kids. As for them going to the pictures, I don't believe a word of it. Jessica's probably round his flat as we speak with her knickers around her ankles. They're probably right in the middle of creating more kids for the smarmy, villainous bastard.'

Furious, Joyce stood up and hit him with the broom. 'How dare you talk about our daughter like that? She's got morals, our Jessica. What are you, some bloody pervert?'

Seething, Stanley jumped out of his chair. He rarely gave an opinion in this house and when he did he got called a bloody nonce. More than anything else in the world, he wanted to pick up Joycie's broom and smash her right over the head with it. Maybe that would make the stupid, naive woman see sense. Filled with self-loathing, Stanley ran to the serenity of his shed. Once inside, he sat on his wooden bench, put his head in his hands and cried.

His old mum had mapped out his life for him at a very early age. 'Stanley, always remember son, it's better to be a

live coward than a dead hero.'

Stanley wiped his eyes with his hanky. He feared for his Jessica. That Eddie was cold and calculating. He had those horrible dark eyes, dead man's eyes. There was sod all he could do about it though. He was far too weak a man. What the Mitchells wanted, the Mitchells got, and who was he to stop them?

TWO

BACK AT EDDIE'S flat, Jessica fumbled with the zip of her boyfriend's trousers. Realising she still had her knickers around her ankles, she quickly stepped out of them.

Eddie threw her onto the double bed. He expertly entered her and held both of her hands down with his own. He liked it that way; it gave him total control.

'Aw, baby,' he moaned as he shot his seed and pulled himself out of her. Not wanting to be selfish, Eddie used his index finger to pleasure her.

'Oh Eddie,' Jessica cried, as she reached her climax.

Confident that she was satisfied, Eddie rolled onto his back and lit up two cigarettes. Handing one to Jess, he grinned. He'd been told in the past by birds that he had bigger fingers than most men's cocks, and he certainly knew how to use them.

'Did you enjoy that, babe?' he asked, as he studied the smoke rings he was blowing.

Jessica propped herself up on one elbow. She loved taking in his naked body and his handsome face. 'I always enjoy it, Eddie, you know I do.'

Eddie put his arm around her and kissed her gently on the forehead. 'So what do you reckon your parents thought of me?' he asked.

Jessica laid her head on his chest. 'Mum loved you. She thought you were great. Dad's more old-fashioned, but I'm sure he liked you in his own way.'

Eddie smirked at her take on things. The mother he'd had eating out of his hand, but the old man, he knew, had hated

him on sight. Gently easing Jessica off him, Eddie jumped out of bed.

‘I’m gonna have a quick bath and then I’ll take you out for a drink.’

‘OK. Save me some hot water so I can freshen up, too.’

Jessica smiled as she watched his muscly long legs and gorgeous naked buttocks walk away from her. She’d only met him four weeks ago at a mate’s birthday party. Their eyes had locked and that was it, they’d been inseparable ever since. Jessica couldn’t believe her luck. Eddie was rich, handsome and an absolute bloody catch. She’d had boyfriends in the past, even had sex with a couple, but none of them compared to him. Eddie oozed charisma. He treated her like a lady, so much so that he insisted on paying for absolutely everything and picking her up every day from the shoe shop where she worked.

‘No girl of mine is putting their hand in their purse or getting on buses,’ he told her bluntly.

Her workmates were filled with envy. None of their boyfriends even had a car, and when Ed had first pulled up in his gold Mercedes 250C, their jaws had hit the floor.

‘Jess, he’s gorgeous – and look at his posh car. You are so lucky,’ they’d crowed.

Jess giggled to herself. Ed had a big personality, a bulging wallet and a massive willy. No woman could want more and she was a very lucky girl indeed.

Jess thought about her mum’s life. She’d hate to be married to a bus driver and live in the same council house for years like her mum. Her mother didn’t want that either. She was forever giving her good advice. ‘Jess, with your figure and stunning looks, you can get anyone you want. Don’t make the same mistakes as I did and end up with someone like your father. If a good catch comes along, take my advice and grab him with both hands.’

Jessica was aware of how attractive she was. She had long, blonde ringlets, a cute, pointed chin, an amazingly

slim figure and men went crazy for her dimpled cheeks.

'The bathroom's all yours, sexy,' Ed said, walking towards her.

As Jessica walked past him, Eddie stared at her fantastic tits. When he was married to Bev, he'd played around with other birds. Meeting Jess had knocked him for six. She was a major piece of eye candy, had a terrific personality and, since they'd got together, he hadn't so much as glanced at another piece of skirt.

Eddie did up the top button of his shirt. As he secured his tie, he thought about the sex they'd had earlier. He hadn't used a rubber today, he'd forgotten to buy any and it didn't bother him at all. In Jess, Ed was sure he'd found the woman he wanted to spend the rest of his life with and the quicker he put her in the club and stuck a ring on her finger, the better.

Eddie looked up as his brother, Ronny, slammed the front door.

'Am I glad to see you.'

'What's up? Can't you spend a day without me?' Ed asked sarcastically.

Ronny walked towards him. 'Don't muck about, this is serious, Ed. The O'Haras are in the Flag. They're mob-handed and we're gonna need backup if we're gonna sort it. They looked like they were about to smash the pub up. I think they're trying to muscle in on our patch.'

Eddie's features blackened. He'd never laid eyes on any of the O'Haras since last year when his face had got slashed to fuck. He'd caved Jimmy's head in with a baseball bat that day, and the families had avoided one another ever since.

Ed had ended up with forty-seven stitches in his face, but Jimmy had come off worse. He'd spent over a month in hospital, and had to have numerous scans and tests to rule out brain damage.

The feud between the two families had been halted since then. Ed's dad, Harry, had arranged a meet with Jimmy's old man, Butch.

Harry had said, 'Look, we're all trying to earn a few bob here and no one needs all this extra aggravation. I'll do you a deal. You stick on your patch and do what you've gotta do and we'll stay on ours. If you agree to the deal, we'll let bygones be bygones. If you don't, and I find out your boys have stepped one foot in any of our boozers, I promise you there'll be a fucking bloodbath,' Harry had said.

Butch shook hands on it. 'You have my word, you'll have no more trouble from me or my lads,' he promised.

As Jessica walked towards him in a white halter-neck catsuit, Eddie kicked Ronny to urge him to keep schtum.

'You look gorgeous, darling.'

Jessica smiled. Any new clothes she bought now she kept round Eddie's. She had to look the part for her new man.

Ronny was pissed off. What was more important, family business or fucking birds?

'Where are we going?' Jessica asked excitedly.

Eddie decided to give Canning Town a wide berth. He didn't want Jess to see the other side of him. He was a lunatic when he got going and he knew if he came face to face with Jimmy O'Hara, he'd throw him straight through the pub window.

'I thought we'd go to East Ham for a change. A bloke in the Burnell Arms owes me some dough and needs a little reminder. If it's any good, we'll stay there; if it's shit, I'll take you out for a nice meal instead.'

Jessica nodded happily. As long as she was by Eddie's side, she didn't care where she went.

Eddie handed her his keys. 'Go and sit in the car, babe. I just need to have a quick chat with Ronny. It's business, you'll only be bored.'

'Bye, Ronny,' Jessica said as she left the flat. That was one of the things she loved about Eddie. She knew he was a bit

dodgy and she found his little business chats and his life in general bloody exciting.

Eddie made sure she was out of earshot, then turned to his brother. 'Don't ever say too much about what we get up to in front of Jess, will yer?'

Ronny shook his head. 'Fuckin' hell, Ed. You can't put birds in front of family business. You always used to put your family first when you were married to Bev.'

Eddie stood his ground. Ronny wasn't as good-looking as him, and his bird, Sharon, was a big old heifer.

'Look, Ron, family comes first and you know it does, but there's no point in storming in the Flag tonight. We don't know where Paulie is, for a start. Listen, the O'Haras will be well pissed up by now. If you were in there, they'll definitely be expecting a visit from us. They're probably staring at the door as we speak. Our best bet is to leave it a week or two. Let them think they've got away with it, and when they're least expecting it, we'll pounce on 'em.'

Ronny shrugged. Maybe he should go and find his other brother, Paulie. He'd round up a few faces and maybe they could sort it without Eddie.

Eddie read his mind. 'Don't start organising things behind my back, Ron. I'll speak to Paulie tomorrow. We'll sit down properly, put our heads together and hatch a plan.'

Ronny nodded. He knew deep down that Eddie was talking sense, but he was still annoyed. Both he and Paulie were older than Ed, but they never got to call the shots. Even his old man put Eddie before them. It was as though they were the lackeys and Eddie was being primed as his father's successor.

Ronny let out a loud sigh. 'Look, Ed, I like Jessica and that, but is she gonna be hanging round here all the time?'

Eddie smirked. He knew Ronny was fucking jealous. 'Yes, Ron. For your information, Jessica's here for the foreseeable future.'

Eddie slammed the front door as he left the flat. When he'd split up with Bev, he couldn't be arsed buying a place of his own, so he'd moved in with Ronny. He hadn't minded sharing with him, they'd got along OK, but since he'd met Jess, he could sense things were getting a bit awkward.

He opened the car door. 'Sorry about that, darling.'

Jessica kissed him on the cheek. 'Don't worry about me. I know your business is important - you do what you have to do.'

As he drove towards East Ham, one part of Eddie's mind was focused on Jessica and the other on business. The O'Haras had taken a bloody liberty. The British Flag, better known to locals as the Flag, belonged to the Mitchells. It was their headquarters, where they'd meet and discuss work matters. The O'Haras used the Chobham Arms in Stratford, and Eddie wouldn't dream of taking the piss in their pub. Whatever happened, they had to be taught a lesson. He'd speak to his dad tomorrow, see what he had to say.

Eddie pictured Jimmy O'Hara's ugly face. Word had it that since their little fall-out, O'Hara's finances had gone from strength to strength. Jimmy was the middle son. He was only thirty-two, and owned salvage yards out in Essex. Ed hated the cunt with a passion. Jimmy thought he ruled the world and the silly big prick even had the cheek to call himself King of the Gypsies.

'What do you think of them, Ed? Do you like them?'

Realising that he hadn't listened to a word Jessica had said, Eddie apologised. 'Sorry, babe, I had a police car up me arse and I was concentrating on that. Do I like who?'

Jessica laughed. 'T. Rex. My brother Ray is obsessed with them. He spends hours in his bedroom playing their records and he's even started wearing eyeliner like the singer, Marc Bolan. He's in a band himself, with three of his mates. Ray plays the drums and they've done a couple of gigs locally. I went to see them play one night and I was shocked - they were actually quite good.'