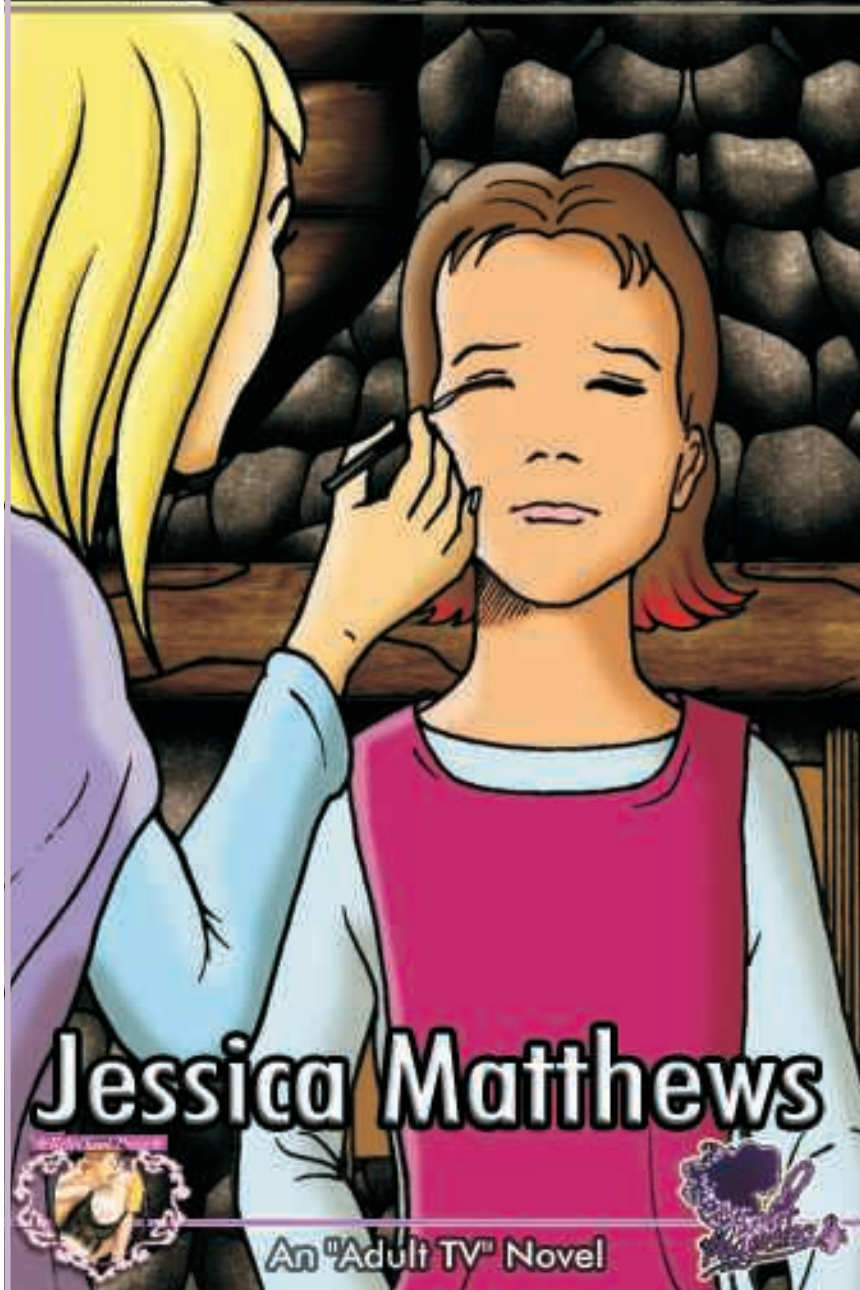


# The Castle



**Jessica Matthews**



An "Adult TV" Novel



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# The Castle

**By Jessica Matthews**

Jaycee Steel did not have the easiest of starts in life. His mother and father met and married in haste and parted just as quickly. Jaycee went to live with his father; when he remarried, the family moved to London.

Father's second marriage didn't last either and he made it obvious that he didn't want Jaycee holding him back when he moved to California. The boy stayed with his stepmother in England and went with her when she returned to Edinburgh, in Scotland where she was born.

Jaycee was a nickname. He was born Jean-Claude but if that was quite normal in France where his real mother came from, it wasn't normal in Scotland, hence the decision to use his initials.

A legacy changed Courtney's life and Jaycee's as well. With it, she was able to give up work and return to study at the University's school of ancient Scots language and history. There she discovered an aptitude for languages and Gaelic came easily to her. They didn't have a lot of spare money but it was ade-

quate, and Jaycee's high school years were entirely conventional.

"I need you to sit down," Courtney said to Jaycee one evening after he had completed his last year of high school. "I've taken a job in the far north of the Highlands, and we get free accommodation there."

"Does that mean I have to come with you?" Jaycee asked. "What about my friends here? I've applied to college for next year too."

"Yes, you have to come with me," Courtney replied. "There's nowhere else for you to go and while we were able to live these last few years when I've been studying, I'm afraid that the money's run out. I need an income, and if I'm going to make a career in the archives, this is a golden opportunity."

"Why do we have to move? Surely you can work in the archives here."

"I've got a job to catalogue the library and archives of the McFelpart clan. They have a huge archive which no one's ever seriously researched. It's really an exciting opportunity."

"But there's nothing there for me to do." Jaycee looked disappointed at the prospect. "I was thinking I might apply to get into an art school here."

"You're going to be paid as my assistant," Courtney replied. "It's going to be valuable experience; you can apply to college when this project is finished. You'll be able to save towards college too. Think of it as a gap year."

"I don't know if college is the right thing for me," he said with a deep sigh. "I think a job with training might be better."

"Don't be silly," Courtney replied. "You hate getting dirty. And besides, there's the legend of Calgacus treasure. It's supposed to be somewhere round the Castle towards Loch Merkland."

“Surely that’s a silly legend from the mists of time.”

“It’s one that’s been taken seriously.” Courtney said. “And there have been some finds of Pictish silver up there.”

“It’s pretty wild country. I saw it on the map.”

“The Loch is near the McFelpart’s ancestral lands,” Courtney explained. “Legend has it that when Ketil Flatnose...”

“Ketil who?”

“He was a Viking and a lot of them had strange nicknames.”

“Was that to distinguish him from Ketil With The Ordinary Nose?”

“Don’t be silly.” Courtney smiled. “It’s nothing to do with Calgacus either. He probably didn’t exist but it’s the first Scottish name we have from Tacitus writings when the Romans came to these lands about two thousand years ago.”

“Is there really a treasure waiting to be found?” Jaycee was imagining himself finding a horde bigger than any pirate’s buried treasure.

“The rumour is persistent through history,” Courtney said. “The Pictish king had it all buried to keep it from the Viking invaders. He was probably killed and the location was lost.”

“How long ago was this?”

“Probably late in the ninth century.”

“Didn’t he leave a map?”

“No, he didn’t,” Courtney laughed. “I don’t think we’re going to find one with an X marking the spot. The Picts didn’t leave any documents anywhere, just some stone carvings... and they weren’t maps either.”

“Just think; somewhere in this cold, soggy land where the sun never shines, there’s a king’s treasure to be found.

“A Victorian landowner became obsessed with finding it,” Courtney continued. “He was found dead on a remote hill one day, with a high status Pictish chain in his bag. They’re very rare and only about a dozen are known.”

“Did he find the hiding place?”

“Who knows; maybe there’s a clue in the castle archives.”

“It all seems pretty remote.” Jaycee wasn’t convinced. “I don’t really want to spend months cut off up there in the Highlands chasing a legend.”

“I can’t see any alternatives, unless your father wants you to go to California.”

“And that’s not going to happen,” Jaycee scoffed. “His latest child bride isn’t going to want me hanging around.”

“Hey, you might like her.” Courtney smiled. “She’s probably nearer your age than his.”

“But she probably doesn’t speak English very well.” Jaycee remembered his last visit to Father. “His girlfriends aren’t chosen for their conversation. I think the last one came from Slovenia, and this one’s from Moldova.”

“You could teach her English?”

“Don’t even joke about it. I haven’t seen my father for more than a couple of days in years,” Jaycee replied. “I think I’m with you whatever happens, at least until I can get into art school.”

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It was a grim day as they drove across the Highland moors. Scotland in late Autumn was devoid of colour; a grey sky and an almost grey landscape. The green grass of summer had given way to washed-out moorland, and the dark grey of the road surface provided little contrast.

They were on my way to meet Stepmother's new employer, the McFelpart of McFelpart; a chieftain of a minor clan in the highlands, with what they were told was an interesting, rather than a distinguished, history.

Their clan seat was little more than a crumbling mansion house, built inside the walls of their ancient castle but it contained a library with the collection of ancient documents which Courtney was being paid to catalogue.

As they drove, they wondered what they might find there and Jaycee's curiosity overrode his doubts about the place. To tell the truth, Courtney was glad of the employment. Her new qualifications in library science and in ancient Scots language and history gave her few options. She had ignored that fact when she chose the courses, because all she really wanted was to get closer to the history of her ancestors.

A few soggy sheep grazed at the side of the road, hardly lifting their heads as the car rumbled past. Majestic deer appeared out of the mist, reminding them that there was in something akin to wilderness in these lands of the far north.

The elderly Ford Fiesta grumbled and rattled through the miles of single track road, protesting at the hills and threatening to go way out of control on the downward slopes. Although it was only four o'clock, the light was fading fast; the headlights hardly penetrated the rain which was falling in sheets and threatening to overwhelm the windscreen wipers.



If Jaycee hadn't been so sharp-eyed, they would have missed the turning off the main road. As it was, Courtney had to reverse a few yards before she could turn into the steeply descending road which was signed to McFelpart Castle. It wasn't a good road and the little Ford, which had sounded rough for the last few miles, finally cut out when they tried to cross through some deep water in a dip in the road.

The car rolled on down a steep slope. It clearly wasn't going to get up the next gradient so Courtney pulled over into a patch of gravel beside a swollen stream. There was silence in the car, apart from the incessant rain drumming on the roof.

"Another fine mess..." Jaycee said, trying to make light of the matter as the car stubbornly refused to start.

"But what do we do now?" Courtney looked at him with a tear in her eye. "I've no idea how far it is to the castle." She stabbed her finger against the screen of her mobile phone. "And there's no signal at all."

"There's a book of maps behind your seat," Jaycee reminded her. "Maybe that could give us some idea of where we are."

He thumbed through the pages and traced the red line of a road with his finger. "I think we turned off here." He showed her the map. "The castle should be in sight when we get over the next hill."

Courtney turned the key and they listened as the starter motor whined. After several more attempts, it struggled to turn over, then stopped altogether.

"I'll walk and get help," Jaycee volunteered. "You can stay dry in here."

"You'll get soaked."

"But it's probably better than both of us staying here," he insisted. "There may not be another car along for ages."

“We’ll both go,” Courtney resolved. “We should stay together. If you get to the castle and they can’t rescue me, how could you tell me? There’s no mobile phone signal here.”

They packed as much as they could into rucksacks, pulled on walking boots, and clad in what they hoped were waterproof jackets, they set off.

Half an hour and lots of rain later, two bedraggled figures arrived at a short bridge at the side of a loch. It took the road to the castle entrance.

“I can’t see any lights or a way in.” Courtney sniffled and shivered as the rain soaked through her supposedly waterproof jacket.

“There’s a rope dangling here, near the door.” Jaycee pulled it and heard the distant ringing of a bell.

They stood in silence watching the door and hoping someone would come soon. Eventually they heard the sound of a lock being turned and the door opened a fraction. A tiny grey-haired lady peered at them through thick glasses.

“I’m the new archivist,” Courtney said. “I think you’re expecting me today.” She had to repeat it and shout.

“So we are,” the woman replied, opening the door. “Come away inside out of this rain. I’m Morag, the General’s housekeeper. My, but you’re both soaked.”

“My car broke down at the other side of that last hill,” Courtney said. “We had to walk from there. All our luggage is in the car.”

Morag put her hand over her ear, cupping it to hear. “I’m a bit deaf,” she said, taking a small pad and a pencil from her overall. “You’ll have to write it down until I get my hearing aid. I think I left it somewhere, but I don’t remember where.”

Courtney wrote it down briefly.

“Your car will be quite safe there. I’ll get someone to fetch it in the morning,” Morag smiled. “Now I’d better find some dry things for you and your daughter before you catch your death of cold.” She indicated that they should go through a door and then scuttled away.

“Did she say *daughter*?” Jaycee hissed but before Courtney could answer, Morag returned.

“I’ll put your clothes to dry.” Morag picked up their outer clothes and bundled them into a wicker basket. “I’ll show you to your rooms and you can get dry. There are robes in the shower rooms with warm towels.”

“That’s great; we’ve nothing dry to wear, and all our luggage is in the car.”

“There should be something to fit you both in the old mistress’ wardrobe. I’ll telephone the General and ask if it’s alright later.”

Courtney wrote a question on the pad.

“The old mistress died twenty years ago but all her things are still here,” Morag explained. “The General doesn’t mind them. Elspeth uses them all the time she’s here. I’m sure she’d not mind if you did the same.”

They went into an old-fashioned kitchen with a huge table and chairs, and best of all, a big fire roaring heat into the room.

“Did she say *daughter*?” Jaycee asked again when he and Courtney stood in front of the fire, grateful for its warmth as they removed their sodden jackets.

“I didn’t hear,” Courtney replied. “Maybe she assumed someone as small and slim with such long hair as yours must be a girl.”

“Don’t rub it in.” Jaycee turned his back to the fire. “It’s not my fault if Dad didn’t give me the genes to

grow into a football star. I can't even grow a moustache."

"That might be great in the present circumstances."

"Why couldn't I have had a normal father, or at least one that I meet occasionally?"

"He didn't give you much," Courtney said a little bitterly. "But you're beautiful all the same, and you've got me." She gave him a damp hug.

Morag returned with towels and a couple of robes. "I'm so pleased you've arrived safely," she said. "The General has been looking forward to meeting you and your daughter. He misses Elspeth since she went away to school. Another wee girl about the place will be so good for him."

Jaycee reached for her pad but Courtney got there first. Morag looked at what she'd written and looked up at them.

"Yes, he was so pleased that you were bringing your daughter," Morag said. "He wouldn't have another boy living here, not since the last one did all that damage in the armoury."

Courtney looked at her and gestured for her to continue.

"He sacked your predecessor on the spot; paid her off and got rid of her and her son. He was so pleased to receive your application and I know he'll be delighted with your daughter. I think that's the reason he decided you were the best applicant for the job."

"Don't say a word," Courtney hissed to Jaycee. "Not a single thing."

Jaycee looked at her and saw that this wasn't the time or place to argue. They removed their clothes and wrapped the robes around themselves, grateful to be warmed in front of the fire. Courtney rubbed

Jaycee's hair with a towel, then secured it like a turban over his head.

"She looks a little like Elspeth too, slim as a pencil and beautiful long hair." Morag smiled at them both. "She'll be eighteen when she comes back in the vacation. She so loves it here in the Highlands."

\*\*\*\*\*

After a warm shower in a surprisingly modern castle bathroom, Courtney and Jaycee returned to the kitchen where a huge fire crackled in the open grate.

"Do I look like an Elspeth?" Jaycee spoke softly to his stepmother as they sat at the table where Morag served bowls of thick broth with chunks of rough bread.

"Not now," Courtney cautioned as Morag returned.

"It's all made here," she said. "The General said I should have something ready. He's away at a diner with his old regiment. He should be back tomorrow or the next day."

Courtney tried to reply but Morag waved her hands, smiled and pointed to her ears, reminding them that she couldn't hear.

"From now on, until I say otherwise, you'll do everything you can to look like an Elspeth." Courtney smiled and nodded at Jaycee, giving no indication that she was giving him an instruction.

"That's silly," he replied. "I'm not a girl."

"No, you're not." Courtney smiled at him. "But I need this job and you heard what Morag said. I got it because my daughter was coming to stay in the castle with me."

"It's too much." Jaycee stared back at her. "I can't do it."

“No, you can and it’s what you’re going to do.” Courtney sounded very determined. “I can’t afford to lose this job. We need the money, and I need something behind me to get the next job.”

“That’s not fair.”

“I didn’t say it was fair,” Courtney replied. “But until I tell you otherwise, you’re my daughter from now on.”

“But I don’t know anything about being a girl.”

“It’s like being a boy, but with added civilisation and less sports,” Courtney replied. “Since you don’t do sports, it should come easy.”

“That’s stupid. Even if I go along with pretending to be a girl, I’ll never get away with it.”

“I’ll just have to make sure that you do then.” Courtney’s look told him that the discussion was over.

“I’ll show you to your rooms,” Morag said when they had finished eating. “You’re in one of the holiday apartments in the round tower.”

They walked through the house and up some magnificent stairs. The house was obviously built for an earlier age of elegance and show.

“Here’s the mistress’ wardrobe,” Morag said, unlocking an oak door off a landing. “Your room is next door, so help yourself to anything you need.”

Courtney mimed something about their car.

“I’ll ask James to bring your car up in the morning if you give me the keys.” Morag smiled and, with a half curtsy, she left them to explore their new accommodation.

“You can’t be serious.” Jaycee started as soon as they were alone. “I’m not going to pretend to be some

dumb girl just because an old man doesn't want a boy living here."

"Listen." Courtney silenced him with a sharp stare. "I may not be your mother..."

"No, you're only my stepmother and..."

"And I'm the one who's looked after you since your own good-for-nothing father dumped you on me," Courtney said. "I've been good to you, now it's your turn to return the favour and do as you're told."

"Or else..."

"Or else you can go. I'm staying here," Courtney said, then softened her voice. "Think of it as a game," she said. "You liked acting at school; this is acting with a bit more method in it."

"It's a bit more than acting a part in a play." Jaycee looked pensive. "How long are we to be here anyway?"

"As long as it takes," Courtney replied. "I've no idea what I'm going to find in the clan archives."

"What do you expect to find?" Jaycee's attention was shifting a little.

"There'll be a lot of problems finding some of the old documents," Courtney admitted. "None of the land nearby is registered, neither is much of it in the Register of Sassines. That means it's probably been in the family for centuries." "Sassines" being the word for old land registers.

"That doesn't sound very interesting."

"There may be all kinds of family squabbles, clan rivalries and the like to be discovered," Courtney replied. "Not many of the McFelpart clan went to the royal court, either before or after the Act of Union in 1707."

"Was Bonnie Prince Charlie here?"

"It's a legend, but who knows what the documents hold." Courtney looked at him. "So will you co-operate, please."

"I guess so," Jaycee agreed. "You'll have to help me though. I don't know the first thing about being a girl."

"I'll make it fun." Courtney hugged him. "If you'll play along with it all, I think we'll be a great mother and daughter team."

\*\*\*\*\*

It started the next morning. Courtney knew she had to do something radical to make Jaycee adapt. She had to get him into character as his female self and stay there. She thought about all the complications as he came out of the shower room, towelling his hair.

"I'm going to pierce your ears," she told him. "Sit here."

"Isn't that taking it too far?" Jaycee complained. "Not every girl has pierced ears."

"I agree not every girl has pierced ears," Courtney repeated. "But *my* daughter has pierced ears. Sit down. This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you."

Jaycee stared at the needle from the repair kit that was always in her purse. It looked sharp and gleaming as she put a wad of tissues behind his ear and looked at him from side to side.

He sat still, petrified with fear and anticipation as he felt the needle being placed, moved, then placed again as she checked again from side to side.

"Take a deep breath and keep still," she demanded and, pursing her lips, thrust the needle through his earlobe.



“That hurts,” he complained but with the needle still stuck through, he daren’t move.

“This may hurt more, so another deep breath.” Courtney pulled out the needle and pushed the post of a rather large hoop earring through the hole and fastened it securely.

Jaycee winced and when he felt her fingers were no longer exerting pressure, he gulped and moved.

“That’s huge,” he said, looking in the mirror and touching the bottom of the earring. “How do I hide that?”

“You don’t hide it,” Courtney replied. “It’s not meant to be hidden. It’s there to remind you to behave properly at all times. Now let me do the other one.”

“Can’t I just wear one?” Jaycee protested.

“That would look very silly on a young lady.” Courtney pushed him into position on the chair and put the wad behind his other ear. “I have to make sure this is in exactly the same place.”

“This is awful.” Jaycee held still. “I can feel the scratching as you’re trying to find the spot. The anticipation is killing me.”

“Don’t exaggerate. How do you think girls go on with several piercings?”

“That’s okay for girls.”

“But lots of boys have pierced ears too.” She held still. “Take a deep breath, here it comes.”

She pushed the needle through and thenm as his face contorted in pain, she pushed the post of the second earring into place and fastened it in place.

“You’ll have to leave them in for about ten days for the holes to heal properly,” Courtney said, wiping his



ears with some antiseptic mouthwash that she carried. "All you have to do is keep them clean."

"I'm glad that's over." Jaycee touched both earrings gently. "Now that they're there, they don't feel so sore." He turned his head left and right in the mirror. "I wouldn't mind but they're far too big for a boy to wear."

"That's the idea. They'll get hidden in your hair when you leave it loose and people will see them when you move your head." Courtney paused. "And when you play with them, like you're doing now."

"They feel different," he said thoughtfully, his hand dropping from the earring. "I think I like the feeling. I can feel them moving."

"So keep liking the feeling," Courtney said. "You've a lot of girl things to learn in a very short time."

"I don't want to do this," Jaycee said. "But now its reality and I've no choice, I rather like the idea."

"Okay, next lesson," Courtney took her cosmetic bag out of her purse. "This is your new best friend."

"It's a pencil." Jaycee looked at her with disbelief.

"It's not just a pencil; it's a kohl pencil," Courtney said. "Watch me; I'll show you how I use it and then you can do the same."

Courtney stroked the pencil around her eyes, under the bottom lashes and into the wet lines, then over her top eyelid, touching under the lid as well. She smudged it gently with her finger.

"That's eyeliner," Jaycee said with disgust in his voice. "You can't expect me to do that."

"I do, I can, and I will expect you to do it. Once it's on, you'll not know it's there but everyone else will see it."

“You’re joking.” Jaycee looked at the pencil in his hand. “A bit of eyeliner won’t turn me into a girl.”

“So you’ve no problem in wearing it then,” Courtney replied. “Please just do it. It’s not for you; it’s for other people to see.”

With a sigh, Jaycee took the pencil and, looking in the mirror, did as he was told.

“Satisfied?” he asked, turning to Courtney.

“I rather like it,” she replied. “Please remember to keep on using it.”

“I guess...’ He looked in the mirror again and started to say something but Courtney interrupted.

“This is mascara. You know want it is; don’t pretend you haven’t seen girls using it.” She held out a yellow tube. “Watch me and then you’re going to do the same.”

Courtney brushed the mascara through her top and bottom lashes, repeating and applying three coats.

“Do I have to have my mouth open as I do it?” Jaycee teased as he accepted the tube.

“I bet you have your mouth open anyway.” Courtney laughed and watched as he stroked the wand through his lashes, secretly noting that his objections didn’t come and his mouth was open too.

Jaycee pulled a face but didn’t reply. He looked at the effect in the mirror and decided that he could live with it. Staying in a castle was going to be weird anyway, so why not go along with it all?

Courtney knew she’s won a major battle there. She smiled to herself. She’d never thought of Jaycee as a girl before but an idea was forming in her mind and it may keep him occupied while she got on with her work.