

It's Not Stepmother's Fault



Jenny Winters

An "Adult TV" Novel



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It's Not Stepmother's Fault

By Jenny Winters

It was a horrible room in a squat. It didn't cost anything which was as well because he couldn't afford anything better. He'd moved at night, without telling anyone. He hoped that no one would be able to trace him.

The knocking at the door said his hopes had been in vain. He didn't answer but he trembled at the thought that it wouldn't take much to force the door open. The trill of his mobile phone broke the silence. If anyone was lingering outside, they'd know that he was in there.

He switched it off as quickly as he could and held his breath. Nothing; not a sound came from outside. He could breathe again. He lay on the floor as the daylight faded and prayed that no one would find him.

"Jackson, open this door." He recognised the voice and cowered further into the corner. "I know you're

in there, you forgot to switch your phone to silent and it's got GPS."

He didn't reply. Elsa, his stepmother was the last person he wanted to see was outside. No, that wasn't true; she was the second to last. His main worry was the debt collectors. They'd promised to find him. They said that they knew how keen he was to see them demonstrate their skills on his ankles with their baseball bats. He knew it wasn't an idle threat.

"Jackson, how long are you going to keep me standing here?" his stepmother shouted again. "You're as useless as your father was."

"Go away," Jackson said in a weak voice.

"You know that I'm not going away. I need to speak to you." She knocked so hard that he feared the door would give way.

"I've nothing to say to you."

"I've plenty to say to *you*."

She banged the door again so that it flew open. She came to stand over him as he cowered into the corner as if it could make him smaller than he was.

Before anything else was said, two men in black suits appeared. He knew who had sent them. Elsa was pushed aside. She scowled at them as if looks could kill.

"Time's up," one said. "Have you decided? Pay up or you'll be limping for life."

"Wait," Elsa said as she saw the bat poised to strike. "How much does he owe?"

"It's roughly Eighteen hundred, plus today's interest and today's collection fee."

"Why is there a collection fee?"

"We had to take a meal break on the way here and we'll need one on the way back. It's going to cost at least seventy-five dollars, so we'll call it an even hundred."

“Wasn’t McDonald’s open?”

“We only eat healthy food.”

“Can we negotiate?”

“No chance; he’s had all the time to pay but the boss says to deal with it today. Take a good look at him. He’s not going to look like that when he gets out of the hospital.”

“Wait, I’ll pay it,” Elsa said. “I can get it. There’s a cash machine across the street.”

“I think we should do one ankle at least,” the second man joined in. “It would encourage the others.”

“No, please don’t.” Elsa stood between them and Jackson who said nothing. “I’ll get the money. One of you can come with me.”

“It’s twenty-five hundred now and if you’re not back with the money in five minutes, it’s three thousand and you’d better call a stretcher for him.”

“I’ll get it.” She turned and ran from the room as fast as her short skirt and towering heels would let her.

“I know you don’t like me Jackson, but you owe me for that.” Elsa drove away with him in the passenger seat and all his worldly possessions in a scruffy rucksack. “How did you get into that mess?”

“I borrowed some money,” he replied.

“You could have come to me if you needed it.”

“You wouldn’t have listened to me. It was for my girlfriend. She wanted to fly out to Vegas for an audition.”

“Did she get the job?”

“I think so; I never heard from her again.”

“So how much did you borrow?”

“Three hundred; I thought she’d pay me back. She made all these promises...”

“And left you to pick up the tab,” Elsa finished the sentence for him. “Why do your relationships always end up in an expensive mess?”

“I really try hard,” he replied. “It seems that I never do enough.”

“You never choose the right girl,” Elsa said. “Never mind, that was then and this is now. I’ve someone who wants to employ you and they’re offering good money.”

“Who’s that?”

“My brother Louie; he’s opening a small hotel next to one of his bars and he wants someone at reception that he can trust.”

“He’s a gangster.”

“My brother is not a gangster. He’s a businessman and property owner,” Elsa started at him. “Don’t ever let me hear you say that again.”

“Okay, he’s as shady as the... I don’t know what.”

“Think of it this way,” Elsa scowled. “You owe me three thousand. You have a chance of a job to pay me back. If you take it, I won’t expect interest. If you don’t, you may get a visit from some of my brother’s associates to collect the money.”

“You’re as bad as he is.”

“No I’m not; I’m the one who’s trying to help you pick yourself up after yet another bad relationship,” she said. “And I just paid three thousand to save you from a life of limping and pain.”

“Okay, I get it,” Jackson replied. “I do owe you. I’ll take the job but I’m not going to get involved in any of Louie’s schemes.”

“He doesn’t scheme. He’s a respectable business man and he’s offering you a place to live as well as the job.”

“You live in the apartment at the back of the reception,” Louie told Jackson when Elsa delivered him to the hotel later that day. “As a bonus, you can get a meal from the bar when it’s open every day.”

“I didn’t know you had hotels as well as girlie bars,” Jackson sneered.

“I never ran one before; this is all new.” Louie waved his arms around his new venture and ignored the sneer. “It doesn’t matter. This isn’t the Ritz. Wendy’s my manager, she’ll be there each day and tell you when you’re working. She lives over the bar.”

“What’s the pay?” Jackson asked, more in hope than expectation of a decent answer.

“Minimum wage less a deduction for what you owe my sister and a deduction for your accommodation.”

“What does that mean?”

“You get ten dollars a day and you can keep the tips.”

“That means you may have paid me what you owe in about three years.” Elsa smiled at another little triumph.

“The dress code’s all black,” Louie said. “I’ll tell them to find something your size.”

Jackson sighed and went to get his rucksack from Elsa’s big SUV. He knew when he was beaten and right then he had no alternatives. If only he’d studied in High School and perhaps played some sports, but there wasn’t much demand for a skinny shrimp like him.

He thought of night school but the fees were beyond him and moving from place to place, as one relationship failed after another, didn’t help. He knew that they usually dissolved in a row about money but it wasn’t easy when he had none.

He was stuck; sunk without a trace, with no prospects and nowhere to go.

"You'll be working on the desk doing the night shifts," Louie explained. "It's simple enough; you take the money, give them a key card and if they leave early, you clean the room for the next guest."

"What day do I get off?" he asked.

"You don't unless Wendy says so," Louie said. "The hotel will be open all hours, seven days a week, starting the day after tomorrow. There's a buzzer at reception if you're away sleeping or anything."

"But the bar's only open five afternoons and evenings," Jackson protested.

"It's a separate business; different tax codes," Louie replied. "You'll probably find that most customers pay cash so I don't want to find you dipping the till. It's me they're paying, not you. Keep a day sheet and hand it in at the bar every day they're open, with the cash."

"But I get to keep the tips?"

"That's right and I don't care how much you make that way."

"What about housekeeping and laundry?"

"Contractors will be in every morning," Louie said. "All you have to do is let them in and watch that they do things properly. Keep them on their toes. This is a brand new investment. I want it kept clean and tidy; no smoking and all that."

"What if they want room service?"

"I told you this ain't the Ritz?" Louie sniggered. "They can order in, or you can provide stuff and overcharge the suckers if you want. Just don't tell me."

"He wants me to be as crooked as he is" Jackson concluded and decided not to ask anything more in case the answers were even more depressing.

Louie looked him over coldly. "You'll do as long as we get on." He punched him on the shoulder and turned to leave. "Take a good look 'round. There are thirty en-suite rooms here. We should do good business."

"Do try and keep on his good side," Elsa said as they watched Louie light a cigar as he stepped out of the door.

"Has he got a good side?" Jackson asked.

"He's giving you a job, and if you were listening carefully, an opportunity to make a bit on the side for yourself. I'd call that a good deal considering where you'd be without me looking after you."

"You're going to tell me that I'm lucky to have you." He sighed and looked at Elsa as he tried not to weep in his misery.

"I've looked after you since your father disappeared," she said. "It's a pity we didn't get on better."

I guess... Jackson's next words wouldn't come, he was so near to tears.

Elsa gave him a quick hug and left him with lipstick on his cheek and a haze of her perfume as she left him there to make the best of his situation.

Jackson looked 'round his new home. It was a better apartment than any he'd had recently. Maybe it wasn't so bad after all. He had a bedroom and a bathroom, a kitchen and a sitting room. The furniture was new and looked solid.

He explored further. Twenty rooms and he looked in them all. Most were little more than bedrooms with a television, a bathroom, a kettle and a small refrigerator which was empty.

The top floor had bigger rooms. A sitting area separate from the bedroom with another television, was

furnished so that it could fit four people, but only one bed. Jackson tested the Wi-Fi as he went round and was pleased to find the signal coming in strongly throughout the place.

He saw the computer behind his chest-high reception desk and switched it on. It opened with a familiar screen and he was relieved to see that the programmes all looked familiar.

One icon puzzled him until he opened it and found it displayed several cameras in every room. He wondered if this was taking security too far, but then he remembered Louie. If they were there, they'd be something he'd schemed up

It was a simple step from finding the cameras to finding that they could be linked to a recording programme for both video and sound. They could record multiple channels, probably from all the rooms and maybe there was one for him too.

He searched one of the rooms and then another. The cameras were quite well concealed but he found them. Armed with this knowledge, he searched his own apartment and found none, although there was one on the public area of reception and one behind his desk.

"Maybe it's not too bad, after all," he thought, wondering if he could go to the bar and ask for a meal.

The bar was dark, even though the sun was shining brightly outside. It didn't look as new as the hotel but it wasn't old.

"You're Jackson," a girl behind the bar said as he approached. "I'm Madison; Maddie for short. Louie said to feed you if you came in. I'll take you through to a table."

She led the way. Jackson watched her rear profile as she did so, admiring her wiggles on stilt heels. Her



skirt couldn't have been shorter or tighter. When she turned 'round to indicate where he could sit, he saw her top was as tight at the front too, showing an almost indecent area of breast. Her teeth were white and even as she smiled, with a touch of lipstick clinging from her generous lips.

Maybe her makeup was a bit heavy but then it wasn't too bright in the place. Knowing Louie, he guessed that the server's uniform and the general dress code would be all his own idea. She returned with a menu and flatware; a glass of water too.

"The staff menu's not the greatest but the burgers are okay and that includes the spicy bean ones."

"I'll take the spicy bean ones then," he said, handing her the menu. "Are you allowed to sit a few minutes and tell me a bit about this place?"

"I'll be back." She disappeared behind a door which he assumed was the kitchen.

Jackson looked around. He was in a side area and as he looked, he saw a stage and a dance floor with a few booths and some tables set at the edge. The bar was over on the opposite side of the place and he heard the clinking of bottles and glasses.

"I can only talk a few moments." She put his burger in front of him.

"I've no idea what's going on here," Jackson said. "My stepmother is Louie's brother, so that's how I got the job."

"I'd better be careful what I say about them then."

"Don't be." Jackson realised he'd said the wrong thing. "We don't get on so good. She bailed me out and got me this job to pay her back."

"You'll like Wendy; she's the General Manager here." Maddie watched him eat. She takes a bit of getting used to, but she's fair and looks after the staff."

"Does that mean she protects them from Louie?"

“He’s not a monster to us; I don’t know why you don’t like him.”

“It’s maybe because he’s related to my step-mother,” Jackson said.

“You’re Jackson.” A tall woman tapped him on the shoulder. “I’m Wendy; I’ll be in reception when you’ve eaten.”

As she turned and walked away, Jackson watched her.

“She has that effect on men,” Maddie laughed. “Remember though, all is not as it seems sometimes.”

“I know what Louie said to you.” Wendy sat at her desk in the hotel’s small office. “I don’t mind you making a bit on the side but don’t get greedy and into trouble. Don’t try to rip off Louie. Remember those two rules and we’ll get along fine.”

As she demonstrated the computer system, Jackson let his mind wander. He didn’t tell her that he’d already worked out the basics as she carried on as if he’d never seen a screen before.

She was an attractive woman, if only her voice wasn’t so deep and her hands so big. He realised what he was thinking and looked at her more closely. The more he looked, the more little things he noticed. Her makeup was too heavy and ever so precise. Her nails, her hair, everything was so perfect.

“You’re a boy like me.” He gasped out loud, then realised what he’d said. “I don’t mean that badly,” he stuttered.

“It’s okay, I think.” She looked at him as if searching for a reason to start an argument but then she relaxed. “I’m the best woman I can be, even if creation didn’t quite plan it that way.”

"That's okay," Jackson stammered again. "I didn't mean to be rude; I've never been so close to anyone before... anyone like you, I mean."

"I think you have, but you couldn't tell." Wendy looked at him as if asking a question.

"I only met Maddie." Jackson suddenly realised that was what she meant.

"All the girls here started out as boys," Wendy said. "That's why the place is so popular."

"And I'm the only exception."

"Yes, but you don't have to be."

He didn't dare to ask what she meant and blushed instead.

Wendy stood up and came 'round the desk to stand close to him. Her perfume was sweet and citrusy at the same time. She reached her hand out and ran it through his hair.

"I think you might like this place more than you think," she said. "I'll sit with you at the reception from seven through nine this week, then you're on your own."

"Louie said something about ordering in for the rooms," he said.

"You use the bar first but if it's after the kitchen's closing time, then the number to call is on the wall. Same goes for drinks too and you're expected to mark them up. The prices are on the wall. You pay the bar price and keep the rest."

"Louie mentioned tips."

"You keep those too."

"I get off work in an hour," Maddie said as she served Jackson in the bar. "I have the afternoon free

and you don't start until later. You could take me for a walk if you'd like."

"Why would I do that?" Jackson answered a little coldly.

"I could show you 'round," she replied, looking hurt at his reaction. "It would help you get used to the area."

"You're right." Jackson smiled and met her eyes, dark and heavy with mascara and black liner. "It's a nice day and I could use some time away from here."

"Me too; I seem to spend most of my life inside these walls." Maddie waved her arms as if to touch the walls. "And my evening shift starts at ten until closing."

"When do you get to go home?"

"I live here some of the time," she replied. "There's a dormitory over the bar. I like it; it's safer than having to walk home in the early hours."

A voice called from the back of the bar. Maddie touched his hand and stood, then walked back to the back of the bar.

"I'll call for you when I finish," she said as she disappeared.

Jackson finished his meal, then went back to his rooms. He changed to clean jeans and a denim shirt and waited. He wondered if he was being wise. He understood that he liked Maddie. He liked the way she looked and moved. She certainly seemed far nicer than his recent girlfriends.

That was the problem. They had been girlfriends. Maddie looked like an ideal girlfriend but Wendy had suggested that she was really a boy. He wasn't like that; he didn't date boys. But she didn't look anything like a boy. If Wendy hadn't told him, he wouldn't be worrying. He thought some more.

"It doesn't matter," he said to himself. "It's not as if I'm making a commitment."

An hour later, Jackson was ready. Maddie wasn't in the bar when he expected to collect her but he guessed she'd want to change out of her work uniform before she went out.

"I hoped you'd be waiting."

Maddie came from the back of the bar. She'd changed and her chestnut hair hung loose over her shoulders. Her makeup was just as heavy but somehow it looked fresher and more suitable for the outside.

He looked carefully at her; black shadow on her eyes, with heavy mascara; pale peach lipstick. Her dress was short and flared, with a low neckline showing the top of her breasts. The bodice was tight to her waist. It was a deep red colour which matched her wedge sandals. Her fingernails and toes were almost the same colour.

"You smell nice." Jackson noticed her perfume as soon as she hugged him in welcome.

"I thought it was better than the scent of the kitchen." She smiled, showing those perfect white teeth.

They walked into the street; she immediately took his arm and walked close.

"I'm glad you came to work here," she said. "I was thinking I should leave altogether and live in my house."

"You have a house?"

"I have a business too," Maddie replied. "I only work for Louie occasionally. It keeps me grounded and up to date."

"Don't stay for me," he replied.

"I want to. I think you have promise."