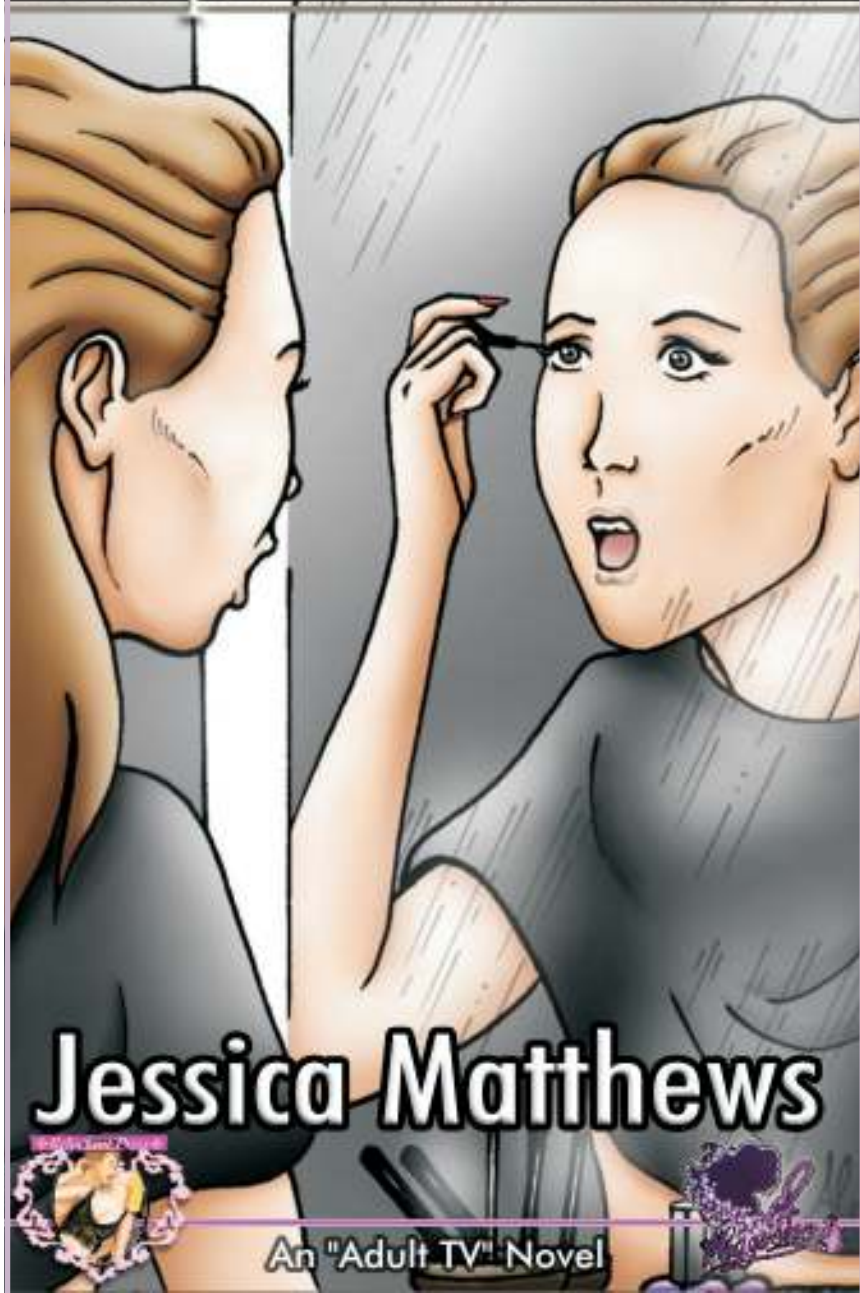


Stepmom's Sister



Jessica Matthews



An "Adult TV" Novel



Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers

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Stepmom's Sister

By Jessica Matthews

“But she’s not my aunt.” Darren tried not to shout. “You’re my stepmother and Olivia’s your sister, so she’s not related to me.

“Calm down, dear.” Helen replied. “Your father told you to treat everyone as part of our extended family. I don’t want to have to tell him that you’re not helping.”

“But I don’t want to be part of her stupid act” Darren said. “I’ve seen it and I didn’t like it at all.”

“She’s made a lot of money with that act, as you call it.” Helen’s voice dropped a tone quieter. “The scripts change a lot over the season.”

“Okay, but she’s always had a straight man with her before. How come she can’t find another now? It’s not as if she’s going to work in Alaska.”

“Of course not, but she’s going to be entertaining on a cruise ship for the next six months, and longer if the contract is extended. It’s a good break for her.”

“But a pretty lousy one for me, if I’ve got to go and be her stooge for the duration.”

“But all you have to do is stand there and look stupid...”

“He could do that easily,” Darren’s stepsister Shanae interrupted. “He could win the stupid prize for being stupid any day.”

“Keep out of this,” Helen said. “It’s a great opportunity for Darren to get some experience.”

“Some experience,” Darren scoffed.

“You’ve always loved being part of the Players Company here in town. You told me that your ambition was to be a good actor. Here’s a chance to get some real experience.”

“Think about it.” Darren counted off on his fingers. “I don’t have to say anything. I have to look as if I don’t understand anything. I have to wear a blonde wig. I have to look like a comic drag act. All I get to do is stand there while she bounces jokes off me and the audience laugh at me.”

“Like I said, you get to learn by appearing in front of an audience,” Helen insisted. “It’s not as if you’re going to be doing anything else this year. The drama college told you to get some experience and maybe they’d consider you next year.”

“I don’t think I’d meet the physical requirements for her stooge,” Darren said pompously.

“No, you’re too short, too skinny, and your hair’s too scraggy,” Shanae butted in. “You’d make a good ugly sister if they wanted you to be the ugly sister’s ugly sister.”

“I think that you’re the ideal size; a bit of padding could make your figure presentable,” Helen said. “Your hair’s almost to your waist, even though the colour is mouse and the condition’s been badly neglected. The way you tie it back doesn’t help.”

“I hoped to get something better than being a third-rate drag act.”

“You’d never be a first rate one,” Shanae interrupted again. “You couldn’t even act like you’re interested in any of my girlfriends.”

“That’s because they’re obsessed with winning the girl who has the most boyfriends in a month competition.”

“They’re not like that.”

“You’ve not been watching. They pass them round and tell each other what a dreadful experience they’ve had, and then coo and pout when one of their friends tries it with the same guy.”

“Stop it, you two!” Helen shouted. “Shanae, please don’t upset your new brother. He’s not as old as you and probably finds some of your friends a bit scary; I know I worry about them sometimes.”

“They’re just girls who want a bit of fun,” Shanae pouted.

“And I don’t want to become their latest bit of fun,” Darren added.

“Anyway, I’ve told Olivia that you’ll be ready for rehearsals when she gets back from meeting with her scriptwriters,” Helen said. “Your father agrees that it’s a good opportunity for you to learn something instead of hanging around here doing nothing.”

“He only wants me out of the way so that we won’t fight so much.” Darren stood, ready to leave.

“Is that such a bad thing?” Shanae challenged him.

“Tell me which actor got their start by standing dumbly as the butt of a comedian’s jokes. Ask me which actor was mad enough to think that looking like a boy in bad drag was a good career move.”

“Ask me who’s going to shut up complaining and do as he’s told,” Helen snapped. “Olivia’s going to be in charge of you. You’ll do as she tells you or there’ll be consequences you won’t like.

Darren looked at her angrily. He realised that the discussion was over and that he’d lost.

His stepmother had won again.

“I heard that you don’t want to work with me.” Olivia opened the door to Darren’s room. “May I come in and talk it over?”

“There’s nothing to talk about,” Darren said sullenly. “I told my stepmom that I don’t want to do it, but she says I have to, so there’s nothing to talk about.”

“I’d rather we could be friends though,” Olivia said. “I’d hoped someone else would be with me, but I got let down.”

“So that’s supposed to console me? I wasn’t your first choice?”

“I didn’t mean it like that.” Olivia came to sit beside him. “I mean that there was this guy, but then he decided that someone else was more important.”

“I’m sorry for your loss.” Darren turned away.

“I guess it wasn’t much of a loss if he could let me down like that.”

“So I’m left as piggy in the middle,” Darren replied. “Even my dad says I should help out.”

“Maybe you could think of it as a bit of a vacation, a bit of experience in front of an audience, and the opportunity to travel.”

“On a cruise ship, full of retirees?”

“They’re good tippers, especially if they like the show,” Olivia said. “You could make enough to replace that clunker you’ve been trying to get on the road all year.”

“I’ll admit that could be good.” Darren softened a little. “But I don’t like the idea of having everyone seeing that I’m dressed as a girl when I’m obviously a boy.”

“Let’s break that down,” Olivia said. “Think of it like a clown suit.”

“Is that supposed to help me?”

“Think a little longer before you dismiss it.”

Olivia opened her mobile and pulled up a picture of a clown in full makeup, with a huge red nose and lips, over a pure white face. The clown costume in-

cluded baggy trousers, hugely elongated shoes, and an oversize shirt.

“How many people would recognise this guy out of costume?”

“Not many, I guess,” Darren admitted.

“So your costume would give you that freedom when we’re not required to be performing.”

“Maybe that’s not so bad, but I’ve seen your routine on YouTube. I’d be humiliated every night.”

“Of course you wouldn’t.”

Olivia was surprised to hear him say that he’d seen her act; perhaps he was interested after all.

“I didn’t know you’d seen my act.”

“It’s not that bad,” Darren said. “I just never saw myself as being the one standing next to you in the dress that doesn’t fit.”

“Don’t think of it as being you. You’d be playing a part; that of the one who doesn’t seem to understand the jokes. You don’t even have any lines to say. All you have to do is stand there.”

“I know I’ve got no options,” Darren said. “Your sister’s told me what I have to do.”

“She can be bossy, can’t she?” Olivia replied. “How do you think I managed growing up with her as my big sister?”

“She has a whim of iron,” Darren said.

“Hey, that’s in a Slaid Cleaves song.” Olivia sang quietly, “She had a whim of iron. You couldn’t tell her

no. And if you did she'd prove you wrong. And say - I told you so!

"We did that line in class. It was Oliver Hertford, the playwright, who first coined it, I think."

"It doesn't matter," Olivia replied. "It suits my sister."

"I think my dad's already found that out," Darren replied.

"So can we agree that you might not like the idea but you're coming with me, and we're going to try and be friends?" Olivia asked.

"If it gets my stepmom out of my hair for a few weeks, what's wrong with that?" Darren said.

In his heart, he could think of a lot that was wrong with it.

"We need a dress rehearsal," Olivia said when they were having a family brunch.

"Can I come and watch?" Shanae asked. "He's going to look so stupid."

"At least I'll be getting paid for looking stupid," Darren shouted back. "You do it for free."

"Stop it, stop it." Helen held up her hands. "Darren's helping your aunt to do her show. There's nothing stupid about that."

"I didn't say there was anything stupid about the show." Shanae pulled a face at Darren. "I said he's going to *look* stupid. Can I do his makeup?"

"No you can't," Olivia interrupted. "I know what he's got to look like."

“Wait, did you say that I have to wear makeup?” Darren asked. “You didn’t tell me that.”

“I thought you knew,” Olivia replied. “You’re supposed to look a bit like a girl. The joke for the audience is mainly you being a boy at the centre of the show. I have to act as if I’m not in on the joke at all. You have to stand there as if you don’t get what’s going on.”

“And girls wear makeup,” Shanae added. “Or haven’t you got close enough to a live one to notice?”

“I can see enough to know that your friends have no artistic talent,” Darren replied. “They’ve too much makeup and too little skill using it. Do they have big paint brushes in their purses?”

“Enough!” Helen shouted. “Darren’s doing it because he has to. He’s not doing it for you two to shout at each other.”

“I bet he likes being a girl,” Shanae said quietly.

“Probably more than you do.” Darren’s reply took him by surprise and he blushed. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have said that.”

“I think you’ll have fun as well as being on stage with me.” Olivia tried to get away from the argument. “You’ll be able to go ashore sometimes, and the facilities of the on-board are really good. There’s a pool and a gym which we can use. We’re not performing all day.”

“Do we get days off?” Darren asked.

“Usually only on days when we’re in port and there’s something arranged for the passengers ashore,” Olivia replied. “But there are some days

when we have to be in performance mode and mingle with the guests after dinner.”

“I don’t have to talk to them, do I?” Darren felt this was asking too much.

“You only have to be in costume; remember that you’re the one who stands beside me and has no idea what’s going on. You don’t have to say anything.”

“So all I have to do is stand there?” Darren said. “You don’t really need me to be there.”

“But I do; all performers have to mingle and chat with people. You’re lucky; you can stay in character and say nothing. I have to make small talk with them.”

“Are you the only entertainers on the ship?” Hellen asked.

“We’re usually not,” Olivia replied, glad to change the subject. “There’s often a professional dance couple who do displays and dance instruction.”

“He could go to that. Have you ever seen him trying to dance?” Shanae grinned wickedly across the table, but Darren thought better of replying.

“There may be a speciality act or two; maybe a magician, as well as a small band and a singer. There’s usually a guest lecturer on board. They’ll be giving a few speeches and presentations, and we’re all expected to help each other out.”

“How do we do that?”

“We turn up to their shows. We look happy, interested and applaud enthusiastically. We have to support each other, because let’s face it; we can’t always be on top of our form.”

“That’s a lot,” Darren said.

“There are about five and a half thousand people on the cruise. The ship’s a bit like a floating holiday town.’

“So do you really understand what you have to do?” Olivia asked when they met at her apartment the following day.”

“I think so,” Darren replied. “I stand looking at you as you tell some story. You get to the punch line, and I don’t react. I look at the audience as if I’m wondering what’s going on.”

“And you’ve no idea why they’re laughing.”

“It doesn’t sound too hard.”

“It will be sometimes,” Olivia replied. “There’ll be times when something will make you laugh. You’ll try to hide it, and that’ll make you laugh more.”

“I guess when I’ve heard the act a few times, it’ll all get routine.”

“That’s when the urge to laugh in the wrong places will get harder and harder to resist.” Olivia said. “Believe me; I’ve seen it happen time after time.”

“I’ll try not to.”

“You’ll never manage it.” Olivia smiled. “That’s the great thing about it. You’ll laugh, and the audience will see you trying to stifle it. That makes them laugh more, and so you’ll find it harder to stop.”

“So they laugh at me?”

“No, they’re laughing with you, enjoying the moment when they think the show’s going wrong.”

“But isn’t it going wrong then?”

“It’s going well. I’m the comedian and they’re laughing. What’s not to like?”

“Do I really have to do it in costume?” Darren changed the subject. “Couldn’t it work as well if I was a schoolboy in a school uniform?”

“One of your costumes is a schoolgirl costume,” Olivia said. “And it would never work the other way round.”

“Why not?”

“Believe me; it wouldn’t. It’s the ridiculousness of the situation that makes it work and you as a schoolboy wouldn’t be funny.”

“So why would me dressed as a schoolgirl be funny?”

“You’re not really asking me to explain that, are you?”

“It’s too ridiculous.”

“That’s why it works,” Olivia said. “They all know you’re not a schoolgirl, just as they’ll know you’re not the waitress, the old lady, the tennis player, or the burlesque dancer.”

“Do I have to wear all those costumes?”

Yes, and as many more as I can think of,” Olivia said. “The more costumes and the better you play dumb, the easier it goes.”

“Are you saying that you couldn’t do it without a stooge?”

"I'd have to change everything, and I'd hate to try it alone," Olivia replied. "But I can handle these routines, and they usually work."

"I guess that's it," Darren said. "When do we sail?"

"In a week.," Olivia replied. "But don't think it's a week off. We have to check the costumes, we have to design your makeup, and make sure that we each know what the other expects in performance."

"That makes it sound like high art."

"It's like everything on stage. It needs to be rehearsed."

"I guess..."

"And while you're here, I have your contract. It needs you to sign it so that I can confirm your place on the ship." Olivia handed him a pen and some papers.

Darren looked them through, turning pages slowly.

"Is this for real?" he asked. "Are they really going to pay me so much?"

"That's what it says, and don't forget, you get fed on board as well," Olivia said, "And you don't even have to buy your own costumes."

"That makes it easier." Darren signed and handed the papers back. That was it. He was signed up for better or worse... and the money of course made it a little better.

But he'd still guess the worst, if you could have asked him.

“It’s a very impressive ship.” Darren’s father handed him a brochure. “I don’t think we could afford one of their cruises.”

“I’m sure I wouldn’t want one,” Darren sighed. “Why didn’t you get me out of this?”

“Helen’s very determined,” Dad replied.

“I know that,” Darren said. “You daren’t cross her.”

“Don’t be mean about your stepmom. She means well and she’s told me how determined she is to bring you and I into the wider family.”

“It’s a funny way to do it,” Darren replied. “I get sent away with her sister...”

“Who’s only a few years older than you, remember.”

“I get sent away with her sister, to do some ridiculous performance for weeks, possibly longer.”

“She’s got you into something that should pay well,” Dad replied.

“There is that,” Darren said. “But what are my chances of making friends here, having a girlfriend even, if I’m prancing about a ship wearing a dress and bad makeup.”

“But you’re an actor,” Dad replied. “All girls love an actor.”

“I wish...”

“Have you really used these costumes before?” Darren asked, looking through the clothes hanging on the rack in Olivia’s spare room.

“Yes and before you ask, they’ve all been cleaned and I checked the sizes with Helen,” Olivia said. “They’ll fit you quite easily.”

“What about all these shoes?” Darren looked at the several pairs lined up against the wall.

“They’re new and all in your size.”

“Some of them have high heels,” Darren complained.

“Well spotted. They’re what girls usually wear... well not all the time, but some of the time, and they go with some of the costumes,” Olivia replied. “Obviously you’d wear trainers with the tennis dress, and ballet flats with the leotard.”

“Isn’t that taking this dressing a bit too far?”

“No, it’s entirely correct,” Olivia said. “You’ve got to be seen as if you’re trying to fit in with whatever story I’m telling.”

“But I’m going to look wrong,” Darren said. “So why bother?”

“It’s the attention to detail that’s important.” Olivia held out a ball gown. “Look at this. You’d have to wear heels with a dress like this, and an evening makeup; good jewellery and carry a matching purse.”

“I guess that would be right for a girl.”

“And you’ll be wearing your highest heels; you’ll limp a bit and hobble.”

“Is that funny?”

“It is when your purse is ridiculously wrong, your makeup is too heavy and your jewellery is excessive and junk.”

“I still don’t get why that should be funny.”

“It’s the visual to go with whatever tale I’m telling,” Olivia replied.

“What’s in these bags?” Darren prodded another small pile of bags with designer shop labels.

“That’s your lingerie.”

“Isn’t that taking it too far? I don’t want to wear lingerie. It’s wrong; I’m a boy.”

“Of course you are, dear.” Olivia smiled sweetly. “That’s exactly why you need to wear lingerie.”

“But these labels are expensive.”

“Well spotted.” Olivia smiled again.

“Can’t I simply use my boxers?”

“Don’t be silly.” Olivia opened one of the bags and held up some really feminine panties, pink and with lots of lacy trim and embroidered filigree.

“You’re joking.” Darren blushed.

“Believe me, it’s essential.” Olivia replied. When you see yourself in the mirror with panties and a matching bra, and high heels, maybe with a camisole or a garter belt and stockings, you’ll get such a feeling...”

“A feeling that this shouldn’t be happening.”

“...such a feeling of femininity, that you’ll fall into character easily,” Olivia replied.

“Didn’t your last stooge leave his stuff anyway?”

“That’s not the point; you couldn’t feel so feminine in handed down lingerie.” Olivia held out some black panties towards him. “This is your lingerie; all yours and yours alone.” Olivia said. “I promise that you’ll feel so different when you’re wearing it.”

“I shouldn’t,” Darren replied, picking up another of the bags and feeling the silky material inside. “I couldn’t...”

“Oh, but you will,” Olivia said. “I’ll bet that even now, your mind is tumbling over with thoughts that you’re being let into some of the secrets that we women keep from most men.”

“I really don’t want...”

“Don’t worry; it’s all going to come together when we’re doing it in front of an audience.”

“When do I get to hear the tale you’re telling?” Darren blushed and tried to change the subject.

“That’s not until we’re on stage,” Olivia replied. “I want it to be as fresh for you as it is for the audience.”

“Won’t that make it difficult for me to know how to react?”

“Of course and that’s the beauty of it,” Olivia said. “You have to keep a straight face and act like it’s all going over your head.” You’ll find it difficult and you’ll react, and that’s the spontaneity I want.”

“But I’m bound to laugh,” Darren said. “I’m not going to know what to do next.”

“You’re getting it at last.” Olivia mimed a clapping of her hands. “All you have to do is appear as if you don’t know what it’s all about, and not knowing is a good start.”

“It seems to be all about improvisation.”

“It is, except you don’t have to say a word.”

Olivia opened a silver case on the bureau and looked through it. “I’ll have to buy some new makeup for you.”

“Do I have to...?” Darren started but a look shut him up.

“You’re going to be daubing it on like one of Shanae’s dumb friends,” Olivia said. “I don’t mind how well or how badly you do it, but there’s got to be enough so that the audience can see that you’re wearing makeup.”

“So wrong colours?” Darren suggested.

“You’re getting it,” Olivia said. “You’ll need long false nails and false eyelashes too with your makeup. Everything has to be overdone.”

“It’s going to take me ages to get ready.”

“You’ll soon have it down to a fine art.”

“Aren’t you going to help me?” Darren asked.

“Of course I’m not,” Olivia laughed. “I couldn’t to teach you how to get your makeup wrong. You can manage that all by yourself.”

“Are you enjoying your lessons on how to be a good girl?” Shanae asked when he arrived home.

“I’m not learning how to be a girl,” Darren snapped back.

“You could have fooled me.” Shanae grinned maliciously. “I saw all the lingerie that Olivia was buying for you.”

“It’s part of the costume,” Darren replied.

“It’s the part you’ll love the most,” Shanae continued. “Can I have some pictures to show all your friends?”

“There won’t be any pictures and you don’t know my friends anyway.”

“If I find any and show them around, you won’t have any friends.”

“Stop it. Stop it.” Helen came into the room. “I can hear you bickering from the garden.”

“She could be polite,” Darren said. “I didn’t want to be doing all this stupid stuff anyway.”

“But you’re going to enjoy it,” Shanae retorted. “Think of all the boyfriends you’ll have on the ship. I’ve heard about the way sailors behave.”

“Enough!” Helen shouted. “He’s going with your aunt. She’ll look after him.”

“Will she make sure he gets a clean boyfriend with a big...?” Shanae wouldn’t let it drop.

“I said enough!” Helen shouted in time to prevent Shanae finishing her sentence. “I’m sure Olivia will look after him.”

“Probably more than I get looked after here.” Daren’s face coloured. “I don’t care anymore. You’re making me do this. I don’t want to, but I know that I’ve got no choice.”

“So make the best of it,” Helen said. “Olivia wants you for a dress rehearsal tomorrow.”

“Can I go and watch him get dressed up?” Shanae couldn’t resist another dig. “Are you starting with the sexy schoolgirl?”

Helen glowered at her but said no more. “You’re to stay over with her until it’s time to go on board ship. In the circumstances, I think that’s probably a very good idea.”

“I can’t wait,” Darren said in a voice which belied the words.

“I was told that I shouldn’t bring anything but a change of clothes,” Darren explained when he arrived at Olivia’s apartment.

“You only need something casual for times when you’re off duty and for when you get time ashore.” Olivia took his bag and put it in the corner of the room.

She didn’t tell him that she expected him to be in androgynous clothes, if not girls’ clothes most of the time. It would be easier if he didn’t have too much of his own wardrobe.