

Ruby



Jessica Matthews



An "Adult TV" Novel



Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers

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For information address
Reluctant Press
P.O. Box 5829
Sherman Oaks, CA 91413
USA

Call toll free (800) 359-2116

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'Ruby'

By Jessica Matthews

'I think you're wonderful.' That's not what a boy should say to his stepmother, but it's true.

I was almost seventeen when my father married Alicia. We'd been on our own since a drunk driver's car hit my mother's little Miata and killed her outright when I was five. In the intervening years, I'd gotten used to it all.

It's not that father was a singular person. True, to an outsider he may not have seemed very interesting; he was an accountant for a small company that provided facilities for film and television. They did lots of advertising stuff, some music videos and anything else that was offered.

That's where Alicia came in. She was consultant for makeup and special effects. She met father when 'Megaphone Dungeon' came to record a video in the

studio. I wasn't impressed; industrial death metal isn't my preferred music genre, so I didn't go to see the band or their rushes.

I saw the first cuts of the video when Alicia came to our home and plugged her USB into my laptop. The noise was awful; lots of shouting and no tunes, but I could tell that the video was going to push the boundaries for the group. The noise was still awful, but the video was really different.

I showed it to my friend Kenny who agreed that it was spectacular but he's into all that stuff anyway.

'Would you mind if I married Alicia?' My father asked me a few weeks after they'd met; I knew they'd been dating, and that it had gone from casual to serious quite quickly. 'It would mean that she'll come to live here with us.'

'I think I'm old enough to cope with that.' I said with a grin. 'She's good for you and I really like her.'

There was nothing to dislike about Alicia. She wasn't typical stepmother material; not the wicked witch of the west by any measure. She was slender and had an irrepressibly bubbly personality. She could see the fun in most things and it spread to all around her.

The wedding was quiet. A few work colleagues, a cousin or two from the other side of the country whom I'd never met, and Alicia's small family. She had her parents and a son, Thaddeus, who lived in student accommodation at the University in the next state.

Life settled down quickly and we seemed to have formed a happy family.

Best of all, Alicia loved her work. She woke, slept and breathed enthusiasm into everything. When she found me idling she'd drag me into the small studio she'd created in our guest wing. She'd experiment on me; creating scars and wounds which impressed Kenny until he got used to them all appearing randomly.

I got used to being transformed into an alien or a monster; in fact I loved it when she asked me to be her model. Of course, I grumbled sometimes; what boy wouldn't? One time she transformed me into a wizened old woman which I didn't like. Another time, I was lizard boy and then a freckle faced kindergarten kid.

There was one makeover that I always refused.

'I think I could make you over into the most gorgeous young woman, if you'd let me.' Alicia suggested more than once.

'I don't want to do that.' I always replied.

Several times she tested me further.

'What is it about being made over into a gorgeous girl that you don't like?' She'd ask. 'It could help you understand girls better and maybe help you get a girlfriend.'

'It could also get me into trouble.' I replied. 'Look at me; the skinny kid who didn't grow taller than most girls in my classes.'

'Sure, the skinny kid who has the longest and nicest hair in the class.'

‘That may not be an advantage in getting the girl.’ I laughed at the thought. ‘I do like my hair, but that doesn’t mean I’m going to let you style it.’

‘I could do it so nicely.’ She purred and looked at me pleadingly.

‘It’s not going to happen.’

‘Are you afraid that it might unleash your inner girl side?’ She smiled even though she was challenging me.

‘I wouldn’t feel comfortable.’ I replied and refused to discuss it any further.

She tried several times, but my reply was always the same. It didn’t stop me from allowing all kinds of transformations. I think father never knew who was going to be at the dinner table. As for me, I secretly loved appearing as someone else, as long as it wasn’t as a conventionally looking girl.

Then maybe the persuasion began to work. I didn’t like to suggest that she could make me over into a blonde bimbo after all. That would be giving in and I was still afraid what tricks it might unleash in my mind. I didn’t think that would go down well. I think I was afraid that I’d like it too much.

Of course, that didn’t stop me thinking about it. I did that more and more, and sometimes, when she was away working, I’d sneak into her studio and experiment on myself.

‘Have you been trying my makeup?’ She asked me one day.

‘No.’ I said innocently, as she took a tissue and wiped underneath my eyelid where traces of mascara lingered.

‘You should ask permission.’ She said. ‘I don’t mind, and I could teach you so much.’

‘It’s alright.’ I replied. ‘It was only a one-off. I was passing and thought I’d try something.’

That experience made me resolve to keep it to myself and to be more careful. It didn’t stop me watching the girls and reading her magazines.

I thought about it more and more, but I refused to let her make me over into a girl.

‘Thad called.’ Alicia announced one morning. ‘He’s coming home to go to a party with some old school friends here, and he’s asked me to help him with a costume.’

‘It sounds the sort of thing you do.’ Father replied. ‘I’m sure it will be good to see him.’

‘But a costume; I don’t think I have time to design something for him.’

‘Can’t you use whatever the studio’s churning out?’

‘I’m designing for the next ‘Megaphone Dungeon’ video.’ She replied. ‘It’s called ‘Corpse Bride’ so you can guess what I’m doing.’

‘I’m sure you’ll be able to explain it all to Thad.’ Father smiled indulgently.

'I don't think it's what he has in mind.' Alicia pulled a face.

'What's not to like?' I chipped in. 'He's a student and all that stuff about zombies and walking dead movies is very popular.'

'I'll ask him.' She smiled. 'I've got a lot of prosthetics, fake blood and suppurating wounds.'

'I thought corpses didn't bleed.' I smiled as I said it.

'No-one likes a smart arse.' She laughed. 'And all the things I have are for corpse brides, not for bride grooms. He'll have to be adaptable.'

A few days later, I came home from flipping burgers to find a battered Honda in the drive with a couple of college stickers in the window. I guessed that Thad had arrived. I opened the door and walked in, calling out as I did so. I hadn't met Thad before and wondered if we'd get on.

I needn't have worried. He was much like his mother, smiling and easy to talk to. He was a little taller than me, not that being taller than me said much. I was the small skinny kid in whatever group I was in, but my hair was longer than his.

His was ginger and brushed his shoulders. Mine was a dirty blonde if I'm kind about the colour; mousey if I'm not kind, but it hung between my shoulder blades when I released it from my habitual low pony.

'Are you really serious?' Thad asked after Alicia had shown her corpse bride designs. 'Could you really make me look like that?'

'I wouldn't have shown you if I couldn't.' Alicia looked offended at the suggestion.

'Could you do Tom too?' He pointed at me. 'We could be twin corpses.'

'I've not been invited.' I was horrified at the thought.

'Looking like that, who is ever going to know?'

'It could be fun.' Alicia smiled at me. 'You don't get out enjoying yourself enough.'

'I'm not sure about this.' I said to Thad later that day. 'I've no idea how to behave.'

'Come on.' He replied. 'You're kidding. Everyone knows how a corpse bride acts. She's like a zombie on honeymoon.'

I had to laugh at the absurdity of it. Inwardly, I liked the idea. This was entering a girl's world, but at a tangent. I could always tell myself that I wasn't being made over into a girl. What a conflict; it played havoc with my self-perception, but I knew I wanted to do it.

'I don't think I could get away with turning up uninvited to the party you're going to.' I said as Thad's plans for the party were talked through.

'They'll never know. You never know your luck; you may get picked up by a rich necrophiliac who'll whisk you away to a luxury crypt with its own Jacuzzi.'

‘What’s that about your own Jacuzzi?’ Alicia returned. ‘I’ve got most of the things I need for your transformation in the car. I’d like to do a test though. The difference between something on video and something in real life is important.’

‘I’ll forgive the ‘real life’ bit. Corpses may be past that.’ Thad laughed. ‘I have to be out this evening. Maybe Tom could be your first victim..., err..., I mean subject.’

‘I’m sure Tom will be happy to substitute for you.’ Alicia said sarcastically as he walked out of the door.

I wasn’t so sure. I really liked sitting there as she used her skills on me, but the bride thing was really different. I had a secret thrill about it; being a girl; not being a real one, and all that, but part of me was scared.

I mean I liked girls, and I liked all the stuff around them, but actually to be one was different. But then I wasn’t going to be one. I was the corpse bride.

But was it so different? That thought followed. I got a thrill as I wondered if I could pull it off. Of course, it was a long way from dressing up as the corpse bride to dressing up as a real girl. I knew I’d like it, although I couldn’t have told you why back then.

What a mess my mind was in.

‘Be a dear and help me out.’ Alicia said to me after dinner. ‘I don’t want to let Thad down, but I have no idea how the prosthetics and cosmetics that I have could work without special effects they can add in the studio.’

‘So that’s why I don’t see people like that on the street.’ I joked. ‘I should get some special effect glasses.’

‘I’ll make sure to invent some.’ Alicia smiled, and I agreed to help out, even though I hadn’t the faintest idea of what I was letting myself in for.

‘You’ll have to shower and strip.’ Alicia told me when I stepped into her workrooms over the garage.

I paused and looked at her.

‘Don’t look at me like that.’ She said. ‘You don’t have anything that I haven’t seen before. I work with actors as well as actresses.’

‘Why do I need to shower again today?’

‘Then I can paint you all over with some solvent to make sure that things will stick to your skin.’

‘That sounds awful.’

‘It’s not going to hurt, and it does mean that the removal will be far easier.’ She explained. ‘Things won’t get tangled in your body hair.’

‘I don’t have any.’ I replied. ‘I can’t even start sideburns let alone a moustache.’

‘You have body fuzz all over; everyone does.’

I shrugged and did what I was told. I didn’t even complain when she made me take off my undershorts to make sure that I was coated all over, from my hairline to my toes. It tingled a little; warm rather than unpleasant, and rinsed off after a few minutes.

I tied my hair back out of the way, and lay on my back on something like a reclining chair. Alicia tipped it back and raised it higher.

‘This is where I let Igor do his dissections.’ She placed a towel over my lower half and began to paint something over my chest and another over my face. ‘I don’t want any of this to get in your eyes.’

It was a cold sensation this time, and I could feel something being laid over my chest. She worked round the edges with gentle hands. I could feel the edges being examined and presumed some adhesive was being re-applied to hide the join.

‘It’s not too bad a colour match.’ She said, still working round. ‘Of course the shading for corpse pallor would need to be applied later.’

She took the towel from my face and I looked down. Imagine my horror when I saw that I had two small but perfectly recognisable breasts on my chest. Of course, I couldn’t resist touching them. I’d no experience of the real thing, but they felt real and worst of all, they were stuck to me.

‘It’s prosthetics from ‘Corpse Bride’ remember.’ Alicia grinned when she saw what I was touching. ‘There wasn’t a male option.’

‘You can’t blame me for touching them.’

‘That’s what they all said when we did the video.’ She touched the side under the left breast. ‘You did realise that the drummer was one of the corpses?’

‘I didn’t pay that much attention.’ I replied, feeling the weight on my chest shift as the chair tilted me back to a sitting position. ‘The music was awful.’

‘It may be, but I can’t say that. It’s nominated for an award, so I’ll have to be all smiles at the ceremony when the winner is announced.’

She held out a hand for me to stand, and then examined me from all sides.

‘This chest piece isn’t going to fit Thad.’ She announced, looking at me intently. ‘I did hear him say that he’d be taking you with him to this party.’

‘What does that mean?’ I had a sinking feeling there and then.

‘I have a male chest piece which would be far too big for you, but I could tailor it to fit Thad.’ She thought for a moment. ‘You could go as his bride.’

‘You’re joking; how would I ever live that down?’

‘You wouldn’t have to, remember the theme; corpse bride. You don’t hang around with any of his friends, and they’d never be able to recognise you anyway.’

‘That sounds a really bad idea.’

‘It sounds bad doesn’t it?’ She grinned. ‘It’s so bad it’s probably good, but let’s carry on and then we can think about the overall effect.’

I didn’t want to argue and besides, her enthusiasm was infectious; so I agreed.

‘I don’t want to do a lot of prosthetic work on your face.’ She looked at me intently. ‘It would be too uncomfortable.’

‘How do the actors do it then?’

‘Firstly, they’re actors and it’s what they do if they want to eat. It takes two hours or more to get them ready for a few minutes of screen time, and then that has to be edited.’

‘But they look so..., I don’t want to say real, but you know what I mean.’

‘And you’ll look real too when I’ve finished.’ Alicia looked at me intently once more. ‘I’ve brought a floor length dress with long sleeves for you to wear with boots.’

‘Is that essential?’

‘It means I don’t have to do too much to your skin tones under the dress.’ She replied. ‘Face and neck are all we’ll have to worry about. I’ve some long lace gloves to cover your hands and wrists.’

‘You mean I don’t have to wear long yellowing fingernails.’

‘That’s a great idea.’ Alicia looked up at me. ‘I can trim the finger ends so that they stick through; like the gloves are decaying and your nails have grown that way.’

‘But don’t walking corpses have scrappy hair?’

‘I’ve a wig for you.’ She pointed to a case on the floor beside the door. ‘Your hands will need some heavier stain under the lace, but I think that could be good. Stain because makeup will simply wipe off. The stain may last a day or two longer than you’d like.’

‘I suppose I can live with that, if you think it’s essential.’

‘It is really. There’s a myth that nails and hair continue to grow after death, but that’s not true. The skin recedes and it gives the appearance of growth. I’ll extend your nails, but be careful how you use your hands or the colours will get wiped away.’

‘I’ve seen the nails.’ I said. ‘They look like claws and evil; all yellow and brown.’

‘You’ve been looking at my sketches.’ Alicia laughed. ‘Don’t worry; I’ll not make them too long so that you can’t use your hands.’

‘Won’t you be taking them off later?’

‘I didn’t intend to; there’s a lot of time and work in false nails like that. The party’s in a couple of days, I think you can manage.’

‘But what if someone sees them?’

‘You’d better keep your hands in your pockets.’

‘I’m not going to win this one, am I?’ I sighed. ‘I think I’ve let myself in for far more than I expected.’

A few minutes later I knew that I’d let myself in for far, far more than I ever expected.

‘I can’t believe this is me.’ I stood looking at myself in the mirror.

‘Start with the shoes if you want to get into character.’ Alicia replied.

‘But you haven’t; I’m in bare feet.’ I looked at her. ‘You’ve got me in a black bra which feels like real silk

and lace holding up my false breasts. I've matching panties which feel very strange by the way, and thigh high stockings.'

'By strange, do you mean sexy?'

'Yes.' I blushed.

'The shoes are coming next.' She indicated a pair of black boots with low spike heels. 'And then when I've got you into the dress, I can work on your face and hands.'

I sat and let her slip the boots over my feet. She zipped up the sides and I stood. I was a little wobbly at first, but then realised that I didn't need to be frightened of the heels. The heels were spikes, but only about two inches high. I could walk quite normally.

'You're walking well.' Alicia watched me. 'Try shorter steps and put one foot in front of the other more precisely.'

'Like this?' I asked, walking back and feeling a sway in my hips that wasn't there before.

'That's good.' She took a dress from a garment bag and held it out for me to see.

'That looks expensive.' I touched it gingerly, feeling the silky touch of the fabric.

'That's because it is expensive.' She unzipped the back and indicated that I should step into it.

'It feels too big.' I said, as I slipped my arms into the sleeves.

‘That’s because the corpse bride has lost weight since she last wore it when she was alive.’

‘There’s such a lot of it too.’ I said as she zipped the back closed and I watched in the mirror as the fabric settled over me.

It was a long dress, almost covering my boots. But for the heels, it would have touched the floor. The sleeves were long, and draped over my hands, whilst the neckline was rounded and modestly cut.

‘You can guess why I chose this one.’ She smiled her approval. ‘There’s not too much of your skin showing; no breasts on display, so there’s not too much makeup needed.’

‘These sleeves are going to get in the way.’ I held out my arm and the wide cuffs draped a long way from my hands.

‘They’re called Tudor sleeves and they’re part of the romantic look I’m trying to create for you.’ She adjusted the dress on my shoulders. ‘It’s like a draped bridal dress; totally in keeping with the theme. That’s why it’s black.’

‘I feel different; is it the clothes?’

‘Probably you’re feeling female for the first time in your life. That’s why I dressed you in the lingerie, and the heels, now the dress adds to those feelings.’

‘I can’t believe how different it all makes me feel. It’s as if I’ve become someone else.’

‘Is that a good someone; maybe a dead someone?’

‘Not really; I feel more like a girl someone.’

‘It’s just you.’ Alicia took my hand. ‘Dressing up can allow you to hide yourself away. You can become anyone you want to be. No-one’s going to recognise you anyway.’

I looked at myself in the mirror again and turned left and right, watching the dress flow with me and the curve of my false breasts inside the bodice which, while loose, was still tighter than anything I usually wore.

The more I looked the more I thought I’d like to be this other someone; this girl someone.

I could feel myself slipping down a slippery slope. I didn’t pause to think if I should back out and call a halt to it all.

An hour later and I wasn’t so sure. My complexion had what Alicia called a ghostly pallor. She’d attached some prosthetics to my cheeks and chin.

‘They’re only small ones.’ She said. ‘It’s to give an appearance of skin rotting away.’

‘I’m not sure that I like the wrinkles.’ I said, unconsciously thinking that I could look so much better.

I sat there as she added shading, making it look as if I had hollows around my eyes. I didn’t argue when she told me that I had to wear contact lenses to give my eyes a different look.

‘I look almost demented or desperate.’ I didn’t like the look at all.

‘You’re meant to be a bit scary.’ She laughed at my vanity. ‘If you want glamour, we can try that another time.’

‘Glamour?’ I stuttered and looked at her again; suddenly I liked the idea all over again.

‘Yes, glamour; I think I could make you look quite glamorous very easily. All you need is the right makeup and hairstyle, a bit of strategic padding and you could be the belle of the ball.’

‘My father would think I’ve gone mad, or he’d disown me.’

‘No, he wouldn’t think anything like that.’ She shook her head. ‘He’d think you were being kind to me and letting me practise on you.’

‘And if I went out like that?’ I don’t know what made me ask that question at that moment.

‘I’d tell him that I’d dared you to go and test my skills.’ She replied. ‘But you’d have to take Thad with you in case anything went wrong.’

I didn’t say anything. I liked the idea but I didn’t want to sound too keen. And what could possibly go wrong?

‘You look like rotting flesh.’ Thad’s eyes widened when he arrived home and saw me sitting with Alicia in front of the television.

‘Don’t interrupt.’ Alicia waved her finger at him. ‘Your bride is watching zombies, trying to pick up some tips.’

‘I don’t know if I could move like that.’ I said, taking my eyes off the screen. ‘Morticia Adams feels much more my style.’

‘But she wasn’t...’

‘It’s make-believe.’ Alicia laughed. ‘There’s no set code of conduct for corpses, vampires and other ghouls.’

‘If there was I’d be a rule breaker.’

I stood and went over to Thad, and then did a twirl, making the skirt of my dress flare out and almost falling off my heels.

‘Be careful.’ He caught me and our eyes met; he held me for a moment too long as hidden messages flashed between us.

I pulled away and averted my eyes with feelings that I couldn’t put into words back then.

I sat patiently as Alicia took ages to remove most of the makeup and prosthetics. My nails stayed long and shapely, but she’d painted them a neutral colour rather than leaving them in decaying corpse yellow.

‘I think I’ve learned a lot.’ She said, fastening my hair back and stroking another cream over my face. ‘When it’s party time, I’ll be able to do it all so much more quickly.’

‘It was fun to watch you.’ I said. ‘My face disappeared and someone else emerged. It made me feel so different.’

‘And did you like feeling different?’

‘Yes, I still do.’ I replied. ‘I should be feeling self-conscious or embarrassed, but the lingerie and the heels, and then the dress; they all seemed to change my personality. I felt excited; a tingle.’

‘And you couldn’t stop sneaking a glance at yourself in the mirror over there.’ She pointed to the vanity. ‘You were as vain as any girl, checking herself out in a new dress.’

‘It’s not only the dress.’ I could feel my face colouring. ‘I’d never been that shape before.’

‘Boys don’t generally show off their breasts.’

‘That wasn’t what I meant.’ I could feel myself blushing again.

The day of the party arrived. Alicia had me showered and dressed before I had time to consider what I was letting myself into.

‘I saw your ears were pierced.’ She said. ‘I bet your father doesn’t know.’

‘He never noticed.’ I replied. ‘It was a thing in my class, but I haven’t worn earrings for ages.’

‘The holes are still there, so I brought some essentially ghoulish earrings to go with your costume. They’re black; made of a mineral called jet, and they’ll hang almost to your shoulders.’

‘That’s not a boy thing.’

‘Well spotted.’ She laughed. ‘I thought the idea was that you weren’t going as a boy.’

‘Okay; I’m in your hands; do your worst.’

‘On the contrary, I’m going to do my best.’

It’s funny how long dangling earrings keep reminding a boy that he’s doing something he shouldn’t. I was very conscious of them as I moved. They were so long that I could see them as well as feel them as my head moved.

She motioned for me to lie back on her work bench and to take off my tee shirt. She swabbed my chest and the scent of adhesive filled the room as she spread it across my skin.

‘It needs to prove for a minute or two.’ She explained as she turned to unpack what I knew would be my breastplate.

‘It’s a size bigger than the one you had before. That was a big ‘a’ and this is a full ‘b’ cup. I couldn’t use the other one again and didn’t have time to make another.’ She grinned wickedly. ‘Knowing your reaction last time, I didn’t think you’d object.’

‘I’m in your hands.’ I said as a tingle of excitement rippled through me; I didn’t wonder why.

My excitement increased as I dressed again. Black lace panties and hold-up stockings with deep black lace at the top, and while I was dressing the weight of my adhered breasts kept reminding me that they were there. I don’t know if tit was what Alicia intended because the look on her face as she held out the matching bra and adjusted it for me said that she knew something.

Whatever I was feeling, it wasn't quite a secret.

My dress was a different one this time. It was black of course, with a lower neckline and long lace sleeves which I was sure were going to hang down and get in the way as I used my hands and arms. It was almost floor length, and when I had boots zipped onto my feet, the heels lifted it so that every step wasn't a trip hazard.

'I brought the lace gloves too.' Alicia rummaged on the table behind her. 'It's so messy using makeup on your hands; I thought these would make life easier.'

They weren't sheer, although they were very fine and thin. They covered my arms to the elbows and had delicate patterns in the weave.

'What about my nails?'

'That's another reason why they're easier.' Alicia inspected them. 'I'll change the colour back to corpse yellow.'

'Ugh, I do hate that.'

I sat in the makeup chair as she tied my hair back out of the way and stated on my face and neck.

'I thought half your face could be full glamour, and the other half would be the full corpse effect as if one side has decayed faster than the other.'

'Can I watch?'

'Of course you can't watch. You might learn some secrets.'

An hour later, I was getting a bit cramped from sitting still and then pulling faces as Alicia glued and painted. I could see brushes and pencils, pots and potions of all kinds being used, but I had no idea what I was going to look like.

‘Are you ready for the big reveal?’ She asked eventually. ‘I’m going to hide one side of your face and then the other, before you get the overall effect.’

She positioned the mirror where she wanted it, and adjusted the lights. She pulled away the covers.

‘I can’t believe it.’ I said as I looked at the perfectly made up, perfectly attractive and seductive image of half my face. ‘I thought I was to be a ghoul.’

‘No, you’re a corpse which is an entirely different thing.’ She laughed.

‘I’m serious.’ I protested. ‘I look like my own dream girl.’

‘You’d better see the other side.’ She covered the mirror again and changed the angle.

‘That’s horrible.’ I blurted out; I couldn’t help it.

‘See what I mean.’ Alicia pulled the mirror to show both sides. ‘One side of your face is decaying and the other hasn’t started to decay. I wanted to use this on the video, but they didn’t like it as much as I did.’

‘I think it’s amazing.’ I looked again. ‘Is the pretty side really me?’

I was sent to my room to keep out of the way while she worked on Thad who arrived home just as we were finished. He wasn’t allowed to see me. I sat alone, fascinated by the pretty side.

My mind was racing along. I liked this image; it excited me and opened up a whole range of new fantasies in my mind. Instead of being the shrimp that got ignored, I could be the centre of attention and join in the fun.

More than that, could I fool everyone into thinking I was a real girl? That thought stopped me in my tracks. Did I want to do that? Did I want to be treated like a girl? It's funny how thoughts can slip and slide between fantasies.

Right then, I knew I wanted to try it. I didn't ask myself if I was attracted to boys; maybe I should have. I knew I thought I was attracted to girls, more that I was attracted to things about girls, and if boys came along with that, I could try it.

There couldn't be any harm could there?

'You look awful.' I couldn't help but giggle at my first sight of Thad in his makeup.

'You don't look too bad yourself.' He tried to pull a face back and then remembered he had so much stuck to his skin that he couldn't make it work.

He was dressed in something like a cross between a decayed politician and an undertaker on holiday. His hair looked as if it sprouted in all directions and bits of beard appeared to be falling from his face. But he wasn't a bride; more of a bridegroom.

'I thought you were supposed to be a bride as well?' I looked from Thad to Alicia.