

Uglies by Scott Westerfeld

The mansion was full of brand-new pretties – the worst kind, Peris always used to say. They lived like uglies, a hundred or so together in a big dorm. But this dorm didn't have any rules.

It was all one big party, just like they always promised it would be. People were dressed up tonight, in gowns and in black suits with long coattails. Of course, everyone was always laughing here. Unlike an ugly party, there'd never be any fights, or even arguments.

Tally wondered if she would even recognise Peris. She'd only seen him once since the operation, and that was coming out of the hospital, before the swelling had subsided. But she knew his face so well. Despite what Peris always used to say, pretties didn't really all look *exactly* the same. On their expedition, she and Peris had sometimes spotted pretties who looked familiar, like uglies they'd known. Sort of like a brother or sister – an older, more confident, *much* prettier brother or sister. One you'd be jealous of your whole life, if you'd been born a hundred years ago.

Peris couldn't have changed that much.

Someone stepped quietly into the elevator. When he saw Tally, he jumped. 'Oh dear. Wasn't this party white tie?'

Tally's breath caught, her mouth went dry. 'Peris?' she whispered.

He looked closely at her. 'Do I...'

She started to reach out. Her muscles were screaming from standing on tiptoe. 'It's me, Peris.' The elevator door slid shut, and Tally stumbled forward to see him better. It was Peris: his voice, his brown eyes, the way his forehead crinkled when he was confused.

But he was so *pretty* now.

At school, they explained how it affected you. It didn't matter if you knew about evolution or not – it worked on anyone. On everyone.

There was a certain kind of beauty, a prettiness that everyone could see. Big eyes and full lips like a kid's; smooth, clear skin; symmetrical features; and a thousand other little clues. Somewhere in the backs of their minds, people were always looking for these markers. No one could help seeing them, no matter how they were brought up. A million years of evolution had made it part of the human brain.

The big eyes and lips said: I'm young and vulnerable, I can't hurt you, and you want to protect me. And the rest said: I'm healthy, I won't make you sick. And no matter what you felt about a pretty, there was always a part of you that thought: *if we had kids, they'd be healthy too. I want this pretty person...*

It was biology, they said at school. Like your heart beating, you couldn't help believing all these things, not when you saw a face like this. A pretty face.

A face like Peris'.