

Truth Über Alles by Christine Olinger

# Truth Über Alles

a tale of young love, bad choices,  
and unexpected happy outcomes

by Christine Olinger  
(as the voice of Alessandra Kincaid)

My name is Alles Kincaid. Alessandra, really, but no way would my family call me anything exotic, cool, or unusual like Sandra or Lessa or Allessa. No, my mom gives me this really neat name and then insists on calling me Alles. Like Alice, but nobody can spell it. See what I'm saying? It's such a typical reflection of the lameness that is my life. This blog is my journal, or as I like to think of it, adventures in pathetic angsty crap.

Only recently things got more interesting than usual, which is going some, let me tell you.

I said my life was lame. I never said it was dull.

But today is Valentine's Day and for once-- for once!-- Valentine's Day is not going to suck. Why? Well, that's the story.

Let me begin at the beginning, to quote an old movie starring that cowboy guy and the lady with the red hair. My mother loves old movies. Sue me.

So like I said, I'm Alles Kincaid and my life has sucked most of the time until recently. My mom raised me and my brother Jared by herself. (See-- why didn't she spell his name Gharrhedde or something and call him Rhed just to be evil? Because there is no justice in the world, that's why.) Mom is a witch. I'm a witch, too. Only I don't really think it means what people think it means. I'll get to that later.

Anyway...

I live in Carrington, Massachusetts. It's a wicked pretty town, I admit, but majorly pathetic. Everyone has a lot of money but us and a few other people. Mostly people here are pretty rich and way into letting everyone know they are. I always wanted to live in Cragg Point, directly across the harbor from us. People there seem much more normal. It's where my mum's tearoom is-- The Tattle Tale Tea Room. Yah, I know-- absolutely limp name. So tres quaint, only not. Barf! But it's mum's and she loves it and it's all my family has besides this house. I do like our house. I just wish the house was in

Cragg Point. But whatever, I'm over it.

So right, I live in Carrington, snot capitol of Massachusetts. I go to Our Lady of the Assumption Catholic School because my mother is a sadist. Yes, mother, please send your teen witch daughter to catholic girl's school. Originally mum sent me to public school here but they wanted to accelerate my learning track, which is some kind of guidance counselor code for "she is totally creeping out the other kids because she's smart." Mum thought it would suck if I graduated a year or two early. She also didn't like how the public school teachers seemed to get pissed if I answered too many questions. And then in freshman year I got into, like, this major pissing match with my English teacher because I wrote a paper about Iago's motive in Othello for an AP assignment and said I thought Iago was gay and majorly crushing on Othello and that's why he did the whole frame Desdemona and trash Othello's life thing. This resulted in my mum being called to the school for a meeting. I still think they just wanted to get rid of me and put a happy face on it, you know? But it all ended with mum calling Mrs. Furtando-- my AP English teacher-- a fascist homophobe and me going to OLA High.

Oh, joy! Nothing makes a depressed teen witch happier than a plaid skirt, knee socks, saddle oxfords, and catholic school. Know what, though? I actually mostly like the school. It's progressive and most of the teachers actually have a decent lack of suckitude. The students are lousy with it (suckitude) but that's high school, I guess. A lot of the kids are from Cragg and Carry. I have a few friends who are ok. Mostly I keep my nose in a book and try to avoid extra attention at all costs.

When I got to OLA they tested my IQ and declared that I was a genuine teen-genius. The guidance counselor here-- who actually seems to get some things, go figure-- decided that my mother was wise to allow me a full four year experience. They just put me into the AP program, allowed me some outside study, and let's be honest-- probably made some kind of pact with a saint to keep an eye on me.

The weird thing is I've always been happy about being a witch, since it gives me a sense of family, and when you have no dad that's important to you. My mom is a total freak, but she tries really hard. So I was kinda relieved when it was made clear I would not be in any way inhibited in my religious choices. The actual cool thing about my mom, Persephone Allen, is that she is crispy in a moon-goddess kind of way that you can't help but like. People come to her tearoom in spite of the dumb name because she's a really good card reader. She gives good advice. Makes totally awesome candles. She takes her religion seriously and raised me to be serious about it, too.

I just wish she could rein it in, you know? I mean, she dresses like a mermaid and that's fine, but does

she have to show up at the parent conference night with tiny chimes and seashells woven into her hair? GAWD! Like my life isn't wallowing in enough suckitude without Princess Ariel appearing and getting me absolutely harshed the next day. "Is your mom a hippie?" Hysterical. Really, what an original joke.

\*GAG\*

But I'm cool with not fitting in that much. I don't want to fit in. I like being different, and not in the look-how-different-I-can-be-by-copying-the-current-trendily-different-person way. Not a huge fan of Marilyn Manson. Don't care for counter-culture. Just like to do my own thing. So mostly I write, in my weak just-wing-it way.

So that's me-- writing teen witch with a basically pathetic life. And now you're wondering what this has to do with Valentine's Day and a recent dramatic decline in my personal suckitude levels.

It all started with a dare.

There I am, post-parent-conference morning, and Jasmine Delacourt (mom read bad romance novels much?) is on my butt in study. I'm trying to-- oh, what's the word? oh, right!-- study, and Jasmine is making one rotten joke after the other about my mum and our family owning a tearoom. Jasmine lives in the freaking mansion at the end of my street. Mom, Jared, and me live in the modest cottage that was once a caretaker's house. Jasmine thinks it's hysterical to refer to our family as the KinCaretakers.

Isn't she a riot?

So Jasmine is trying to get me to acknowledge that she is trashing me, my mum, and our tearoom. I'm ignoring her because she sucks and is stupid. I mean she's really stupid. I have no idea how she got into our school, but it might have something to do with the Delacourt Memorial Stadium on the other side of the parking lot. Dedicated to Cabott Delacourt, her grandfather, who was a judge. Just sayin'. Coincidence? I think not.

She's an idiot. I hate her, but try not to hate her so much that she starts mattering, you know? But I was still, to be honest, pissed at my mother about the stupid mermaid act, and she was aggravating me. But I kept on ignoring her while she trashed my family. I shouldn't have taken the bait when she mentioned him.

Oh, come on-- I'm a teenager. Is there a 15 year old girl alive who doesn't have a crush on somebody?

"Eli said his mom got her cards read by Sabrina the teen-witch." She calls me Sabrina. I told you she was stupid.

Thing is, though, I have been trying not to be secretly in love with Eli Barry for-- like-- ever. I so don't want to be that girl. I so don't want to be that pathetic or weak, but I am. I know it's a crush. Everyone has a crush on Eli. You can't help it.

He's not just cute, which he obviously is, duh. He's a really nice person, at least he always seemed like he was to me. I mean everyone in Carrington is mean. The kids are mean, the parents are mean, the dogs bite and the cats scratch. Only Eli isn't. He and Jared get along pretty well. Jared still goes to Carrington High. They played football together.

So when his mum came into The Tattler (as locals call the tearoom) for a reading, my mom recommended she have me read her, since I was really very good with romance readings. Swear to god. Which, by the way, is true. I'm a very good tarot card reader and since my first period (gross, I know) my mom started letting me read at the tearoom and keep my tips. I seem to be really good at reading for people who are looking for love.

But... Eli Barry's mom?

"Eli said he was totally grossed out by it," Jasmine says.

I knew for a fact his mom was happy with her reading, because HELLO, she gave me a ten dollar tip. But the thing is Jasmine's brother Mark was Eli's best friend. So she could have actually heard something.

Was Eli grossed out by my family's religion? I mean, Jared didn't really consider himself anything. Mom said that was fine, he could make up his own mind. But it was no secret mom and I were practicing earth-based, honest-to-goddess witches. My stomach did a little flip flop.

So the two girls-- I don't even remember who they were, now-- with Jasmine are giggling like mad and she has that smirky face that always makes my palms itch to slap her really hard.

"Hey Sabrina-- hey Hermione!" Oh, they are just squealing now. "Did you tell Eli's mom how to cast a love spell? Too bad you can't cast one for yourself. Maybe you'd get a date for Valentine's Day!"

Just shut up and look away, right? I know. But I guess everything really does happen for a reason.

"Jasmine," I said, "is your own life so pathetic and weak that you have to talk about everyone else's? Also, how old are you? I think it's time to pronounce VALENTINE'S Day correctly."

I admit, it had a Nickelodeon Special Movie of the Week moral-of-the-story ring to it. Lame.

Why is it the evil villain girl always narrows her eyes before she says the stupid thing that sets off the chain of events leading to-- you guessed it-- the big problem? They always do. She did.

"You're just pissed because now Eli knows what a loser you are and you're in loooove with him." She bats her squinty eyes and cracks up. "Who's gonna be your Valentine, Sabrina? Are you going to cast a spell on some poor boy?"

Letting this go would have been a great idea at any point here. I don't even know why I got so mad. I mean, everyone crushes on Eli. Why should I even care?

"What if I do? It's none of your business."

Silence. And I know better. We don't threaten people with spells. We don't use magic for negative things. We don't curse the mean lady at the supermarket. We don't talk about our private beliefs in public. It was stupid, stupid, stupid.

Now Jasmine was staring at me with those squinty puke-brown eyes of hers.

"You and your mother are so freaking weird, Alles Kincaid. You should move to Cragg with all the other weirdos. You and your creepy family should just stay over there and do your voodoo. I don't believe in any of it, and I am not afraid of you or your freak-attack mother with her nasty spells and fake fortunes." She leaned over her desk and whispered at me. "Now what are you going to do, Sabrina? Curse me?"

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"You are a snob." I was shaking. My fingers were, like, aching I was gripping the desk so tight. "You know nothing about me, my family, or what we do. So shut up."

"Oh, right," she said, and she was all shrieky and fake and in-my-face. "Maybe you can do a spell that will get you a date. Maybe you can make a voodoo doll of Eli."

"I could if I wanted to."

Why? Why did I say it?

She and her little gang of mafia girls went silent. And then she dared me.

"I dare you."

So predictable.

"I'll give you my diamond tennis bracelet if you can get Eli Barry to ask you out."

And you are saying to yourself, this is where she walks away or tells the little bimbo to stuff it. I wish you were right.

"Deal."

Yup. That's where it became a thing. Hard not to see that coming, though, huh?

So I get off the bus in a panic, let's face it. I've taken a dare I had no business taking and really, really compromised the way my mother taught me our craft, and yeah, yeah-- oh yeah!-- I've bitten off wayyyy more than I can chew.

Great.

Only one thing to do, and I know it. I needed Cass.

Cassiopeia Allen is way cool. Like, way cool is such a lame phrase but it's so hard to think of a way to describe my Auntie Cass. And I know-- Cassiopeia and Persephone Allen-- my gran was a trip. Cass is a year older than my mom and she's incredible. She's an artist. Yeah, THAT Cassie Allen. The one in all the poster shops. She does these amazing interpretive paintings featuring famous images of women in mythology, history, and stuff. Omigawd they are so cool looking. She does people, too, but not very often. I have one in my room that she did of me as the goddess Artemis. I love it so much. When I look at that painting I believe I can somehow be pretty and wise and not pathetic at all.

Cass bought this house for my mom and I swear we would all just die without her.

Plus she covers for me sometimes. Never in a way that, like, makes me think my mother is an idiot and I should ignore her. She just seems to know when it's cool for a teenager to maybe get away with a little something. Like she gave me my first full-on sexual content romance novel when I was 14 and said "don't tell your mom." And when mom found out she was pissed at first then Cass was like "hey, remember when we read Rosemary Rogers while we were babysitting?" They used to babysit this woman who was totally into Rosemary Rogers and they'd read a few chapters each time they babysat.

I flipped through two of her books at the library and almost barfed. So yeah, my Julia Quinn is pretty tame, thanks. Get over it, mom, I know about stuff.

Anyway, I'm frantic now and calling Cass' cell to freak on her. She's in Chicago or somewhere teaching as a guest professor at whatever college. She does that a lot. She's not answering, so I leave a

message to purleaaase call me quick. But see... I have three days left til Valentine's Day and the clock is ticking.

Now, love potions and spells are tricky and generally not a great idea. There are ways to go about it, though. You can do a spell that encourages a person who already likes you to like you more. You can do a spell that makes you more attractive. You can do all sorts of things that don't-- strictly speaking-- interfere with another's will.

This is huge for witches. My gran always said that the “rede” was something invented to make non-witches feel safe. She swears that for the witches who have practiced the way our family has for generations, the idea of “an harme ye none” is just silly. Sometimes harm is necessary, like if a pigophile is going all perv on the local tykes down at the playground, feel free to curse his cahoonies with a serious rash til they fall off. I mean, seriously. Harm can be for the greater good.

But, yeah, I'm a young witch and deciding how to play that game is pretty advanced stuff. And reason and free will are what we believe make humans special among the creatures who walk the earth. So if I'm sounding a little like a new age greeting card here, ok. It's heavy stuff.

But I figure there has to be a way to gently nudge Eli Barry in my direction without turning him into some kind of love zombie. Not that the idea of an Eli Love Zombie is really unattractive. I could so get into it.

Stop. Focus. Problem solving necessary.

Right.

Basic spell craft. Symbol, intention, execution. I need something of Eli's, but I don't have time to actually break into his house or anything. So a photograph or something will have to work.

I rifled through Jared's room before he got home and found a couple of clippings from the local sports pages. Sure enough, there was a shot of Eli from the Powderpuff game (which, for those who are not so clueful, is the annual celebration of stupid where the girls from pep-squad play a football game while the actual guy football players coach and laugh). The photo has his name in the caption, which should help. True names are powerful. Elijah Barry. Great name.

Sorry, Jared, this is an emergency. I lifted the photo and scrambled-- stuffing it away into my backpack because I was late for my shift at the tearoom. I could dig around in the bins in the back room for the rest of the supplies I'd need.

I was, I admit it, excited. I'd never done a full-on spell of this level before and this was serious stuff. Plus Eli-- he was... he was DREAMY. I know, I know-- weak, pathetic, lame. But he was, and maybe I could pull this off in a way that would not condemn me to some kind of eternal karma damnation sentence. Because that would kick butt.

Making a fast snatch-and-grab run through my room, I swapped my plaid school uniform skirt for a pair of jeans, kicked my saddle oxfords off and pulled on a pair of sneakers, and switched the white blouse for a Hello Kitty t-shirt. Books dumped, I grabbed Pan, my familiar, and shoved him into the backpack before scrambling down to hop on my bike and head for work.

Omigawd, you haven't met Pan!

Yet another bright spot in the über suckitude of my world. Pan came to me two years ago, around the same time my mom decided to let me start practicing craft in stead of just watching. My gran always used to say a familiar shows up when you need one. Pan showed up.

He was at the local animal shelter after some brat begged his parents for a ferret for Christmas, got one, and then didn't want to take care of him. I saw him on the local cable community access show they run on Sunday morning, the animal officer showing all the pets up for adoption. One look into his snowy white face and I felt my stomach flip flop. Mom looked at my face, which must have been really charming turning all blue over my cereal bowl, and said "I think you've just found your first familiar."

I told you she was cool sometimes.

Anyway I changed his name from Snowball to Pan and brought him home the same day. We drove over to the shelter, and the second I picked him up something came together with a big click inside me. Been together ever since. He sometimes sneaks into my school backpack anyway, so I knew I could take him along without mom wiggling too much.

Me and Pan are buds. I just didn't want her to know why I wanted him around.

The shop is just on the other side of the harbor that divides Carrington and Cragg Point. As a crow flies it would be a short trip, but I had to pedal a ways to the bridge, across, and down to the Boardwalk Esplanade where our shop sits between the Wired Cafe and Neptune's, a pizza place. We don't get that busy this time of year. Business is steady, but it's the warm weather and tourist traffic that packs people in. Wired had free internet access, and there were tables along the sidewalks out front where people tended to linger in the warm weather.

Mom has regulars. I even have a few now myself since I started doing readings now and then. Mostly these people come in every few months, but there are junkies who will show up every week. We tried to discourage these people. Mom and gran always said they were looking for attention, not help. Summertime, though-- when the weather was good and people were wandering from shop to shop or stopping for a drink, we get impulse readings. And if people are in a group the friends usually get hooked on the idea when they sit in on a reading. Days like that we can rake it in.

Until last summer it was mom, gran, and a woman named Ellen going great guns all day. Then gran died, a heart attack that came out of nowhere. She always used to say that I would be filling the space she would leave. It used to scare me but now... I guess it makes me feel good that things really did balance out.

Part of being a witch is respecting the balance of everything, so I guess me being the new reader was cool. But I still miss gran something wicked, you know?

Anyway, it's February and there would not be a lot of business today. Mom did internet and phone readings but I'm not allowed, so it was going to be mostly cash register babysitting and watching kids who came in to five-finger-discount stuff. I wheeled my bike into the back room, where mom was chatting on the phone with a client. She pointed at my backpack. Pan's head was poking out.

"Sorry," I whispered, but she just smiled and shook her head. He hung out at the shop all the time. Since we didn't sell food or drinks nobody bugged us about it, but I suspect ferrets violated some kind of retail code.

I threw a smallish box on the floor behind the counter out front, tore up some newspaper from the junkmail pile, and made a quickie litter box for Pan. He scrambled up my arm, crawled into the hood of my jacket, and poked his nose out above my shoulder. He slept in my hood a lot, perking up whenever anything interesting happened. Sometimes I forgot he was there and wiggled when a stranger

would point and scream.

The bell at the door jingled and Penny walked in. Penny is my best friend and really an awesome person. I feel a little bad because I forget about her sometimes in the midst of my suckitude and patheticness. But Penny rocks. She lives in Cragg and goes to CPH (Cragg Point High... you really have to follow along, because I can't keep backtracking to get you, k?). Anyway, she comes over to the shop and hangs out a lot and on break we go to Wired for macchiatos.

“What's up?” She flopped over the counter and reached up to give Pan a scratch. Pan loves Penny.

“Keep an ear out for the mother unit. I have sooo much to tell you.”

So I told her. She was like-- wicked supportive but she always is. That's why I love Pen.

“What are you going to do?”

So we agreed to meet at Wired and plan some things together. Nobody should violate all the basic rules of their religion, invade another person's free will space, and incur the wrath of whatever without a little backup. Penny was my wing-chick. We wasted time, cause the shop was totally dead, flipping through some of the books in the romance section. I ditched **Spells for Lovers**, jotted down some notes for **Love Spells for the Modern Witch**, and **Heart Charms and Attraction Spells**.

Penny helped me dig around in the back while mom did an astrological chart on the computer. We found some slightly banged up red candles, a ball of red twine, and the samples bin had a bottle of damascus rose essential oil that had a little left in it.

I was good to go. We hung around out front a while longer, then I yelled out back to mom to go on break. In the corner booth at Wired we sat with my overstuffed backpack. I left Pan at the shop. He was sleeping under the counter inside my hoodie.

“I don't understand why you just don't use the spells right from the book.” Penny rocks, but she knows nothing about craft. Her mom likes me but I think we (mom and me) make her way nervous.

“Good spells never come from books. A real witch makes up her own. Plus it's way more powerful and safe if you make it up yourself and have reversals written in. You give yourself a back door. That

way I know I'm not doing anything long-lasting to him.”

“I **can not believe** you are going to put a love spell on Eli Barry.”

Yah. Public cafe. Screw up much, Pen? I gave her a seriously dirty look.

“You want to stop saying the name out loud, Penny? It's bad enough I'm breaking every rule my mom and Aunt Cassie ever taught me. Let's not have it spread all over town, ok?”

She blushed and we lowered our voices. I dug around in my backpack, pulled out a sheet of notebook paper and a pen. After much discussion and over-running of break time I had my spell. I could wrap the photo around the candle with the spell, bind it with red twine (mom always has tons in the attic), and do it in the woods behind our house that night. Penny promised to cover for me with my mom. One love spell, coming right up.

Only it probably seems pretty stupid and silly to you, but it wasn't. This was a pretty serious thing. I mean I put a few lines in at the end to let Eli off the witchy hook, but still... this was, like, the real deal. I was going to charm somebody.

I think Penny must have seen it in my face.

“It's okay, Al. You wouldn't do anything to hurt anybody. And that snob Jasmine so asked for it. You'll just teach her a lesson and break the spell. Plus if you have a little fun with you-know-who before it breaks...” She did her best eyebrow wiggle, but it came out sort of goofy. You have to love Penny.

So my mission was complete for the moment and I took a deep breath before giving Penny a huge hug and going back to the shop. The runes were cast, as my gran might have said. It was all over now but the spell and the consequences, and I was only willing to think about the spell... at least for now.

It was not the ideal moon for a love spell, at least according to my research on the subject. My research was-- okay, I admit it-- only a few hours long and pretty weak. Yeah, so sue me. I'm pretty much making it up as I go along, ok?

I was so freaked out I kept hearing things in the woods on either side of the path behind our house. The old manor house (where the boss-people lived way back when) burned down a long time ago but there was still a brick shell left in the woods. Mom and I used it for rituals. It was part of our property, a weird sort of reversal of fortune when you think about it. I mean, once long ago rich people lived here in luxury and the servants lived in the caretaker's cottage. Now we lived in the caretaker's cottage and owned the ruins of a brick mansion. And we went out at night under the moon and did creepy stuff in what was probably some old rich dude's drawing room or parlor. Weird.

Well, what about my life was not weird?

The nice thing about the ruined house was that it was open to the sky but still had walls-- half walls, anyway-- and the foundation of the ground floor. So you could be under the moon and stars and still keep a candle burning if you had halfway decent weather. Mom, gran, Cass and me spent a warm spring day taking bricks from the crumbled part of the house and making a small altar. Oh yeah... the locals **loved** that.

But too bad. A witch has to do what a witch had to do.

Pan usually knows when spellwork is coming. He gets edgy and fidgety, which is saying something when you're a ferret. So I got my candle ready and Pan perked up on my shoulder while I sat on a flannel throw and said the spell. I won't lie. I was shaking all over. I was still pretty sure this was a bad idea. No turning back, though. Jasmine Delacourt needed to be put in her place.

I opened up the spell, which I had written out on good linen paper. Read three times, under the moon.

It was all or nothing now.

*Beneath this moon I call upon  
the power of the earth.  
Beneath these stars I call upon  
the blessings of my birth.  
An Allen witch, Kincaid by name  
I come in evening's hour  
to gather close and weave a spell  
with all the bright moon's power.  
I bind to me for just three days  
Elijah Barry's heart.  
I bind to me for just three days  
and then the charm will part.  
I bind with open heart and soul,  
with no intent to harm  
the heart of Eli Barry  
with this, my first love charm.*

I said the spell, repeated it for a total of three, then wrapped the photograph and the spell around the candle, annointed it with all the rose oil I had, and bound it with the red twine. Lighting the candle, thankful it was a stubby thing, I pulled Pan against my chest and cradled him, shaking a little. Omigawd. I'd done it!

I cuddled Pan and kept whispering “by the power of three so let it be” while the candle burned away. The oil helps. Before long both scraps of paper, the twine, and the oil had caught and while Pan and I watched the whole thing became a red lump of mushy wax. Spells take time.

I must have been bugging. I kept hearing rustles that I *knew* were just leaves. But you have to stay with the thing til it's done. You never leave a candle burning unattended in an open place, and you really need to have the patience, and-- well, guts-- to stick it out to the end. So no whining about the cold or the creepy woods noises.

Walking back to the house I had a lot of second thoughts. I know-- hindsight, yada yada. I'm not big on guilt, but I was feeling pretty guilty. And maybe part of that was because I really did, down deep, want Eli to like me. Even if it was only for a little while.

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Really, I can be so pathetically teenagery sometimes. Couldn't you just yack?

Nothing happened for an entire day at school. But then, Eli goes to Carry High like Jared. So whatever. But gawd, it was a long day. Mom said I could skip work that morning. She thought I looked tired. No way, really? I was only up half the night working mojo on the most popular guy in the entire shore area. Like four towns of shoreline worshipped Eli Barry and I just put the whammy on him. So yeah, maybe my eyes were baggy.

Got to the shop that afternoon and Penny was already there. I wish she'd chill. Mom is not stupid and Penny is like-- umm, hello, obvious much? She totally has no sneakitude. Playing on mom's desire to be cool I told her it was a boy thing. Which was not even a lie. And it got a smile so I figured I was safe.

“Oh, by the way, Cassie called and said you'd left a message for her?”

CRAP! I'd forgotten that I called Aunti Cass. Gah!

“Oh, I had a question for her but it's over now so whatever.”

Mom looked suspicious again for a second, but then seemed to just let it go, which was a good thing. I am so not spy material. I can't fake out my mother. I mean, yeah, I'm **doing** it, yeah. But I think we'll agree I'm not doing it very well.

So Penny and me end up back at Wired after a while and I spill the whole thing and she's like “omigawd you must have flaked” when I told her about the noises that weren't noises. I was so into telling her every detail that it took me a few seconds to realize she had shut up completely. Penny never shuts up. Which is fine, because neither do I, so we just take turns being the one not-shutting-up and the one interrupting. It's a complicated relationship, I know, but it works.

Only Penny has shut up, like I said, and after a second or two I notice. She seems to be staring at something behind me. Earth to Penny?

“Hi,” she says.

“Hey.”

No. No no no. It is only day one. It can't be---

But it was. Eli was standing behind me. He was in line and-- HELLO!-- my brother and Jasmine Delacourt's brother are with him. What. The. Crap.

Jared gives me a look. You know one of those looks that you know what it means the second you see it? It was a “what are you up to” look. Now, ok, Jared is a senior and actually not that lame as older brothers go, but he can be kind of bossy. And what gave him the right to look at me like that anyway?

For like a second I thought he knew. But then I knew he couldn't know, so I was over it. Whatever. Bite me, Jared. I have other things on my mind.

Like Eli, who was-- WHAT. THE. CRAP. -- smiling at me.

“You go to Assumption with my sister, don't you?”

Is he talking to me? Crap. He's talking to me. Breath, Alessandra.

“Um yeah.” Brilliant. Very witty. I'm sure he's blown away.

“How come you go there in stead of Carry?” He glanced at Jared and back to me. Yeah, it makes sense he'd wonder, since my brother goes to Carry.

Jared answered before I could, the jerk.

“Because she was creepy smart and they wanted to move her ahead a grade but my mother was afraid to let her graduate too early because the world isn't ready for anyone that freaky yet.”

BUTT MONKEY! Grrrrr! Why are boys so freaking über gross? I was so making him pay for that.

But the cool thing is Eli laughed. He *laughed*. How awesome is that?

“So you're really smart? That's excellent.”

I don't even know if I said anything back. Yes, I am that pathetic. They got their stuff and piled into a table on the other side of the cafe while I tried not to throw up. Penny was white as a sheet.

“Omigawd, Al. I mean omigawd. *It worked.*”

“It's only day one and he knows Jared. They play football together, so maybe it's just a coincidence.”

“No way. No freaking way, Al. *It worked.* He's totally watching you.”

I didn't look. I was way scared I'd hurl. But Penny insisted he kept glancing over at us. She was bugging but let's be honest, so was I.

And when he stopped at our table an hour later I almost lost it. Only Penny's fingernails ripping my knee apart under the table kept me grounded.

“Hey, are you guys going to the bonfire Valentine's Day?”

Eli was speaking to me about Valentine's Day. Breath. Crap. Penny saved me.

“We didn't have plans.” She smiled. Omigawd I so love Pen!

“Would you like to go?” He was *looking at me*. “Your brother was going to go, and I thought I would, too. We could double.”

Now it was Penny's turn to wig, because she has always crushed a little bit on Jared. Somehow-- *somehow*-- we managed to give answers that sealed the deal. Suckitude foiled. But it was a close call. And when the guys all left we went to watch them pull out in Mark Delacourt's truck before we did the pathetically lame squeal-war-dance of teenage girls everywhere. I felt so lame, but I didn't even care.

*I was going to the Valentine's Day bonfire with Eli Barry.*

Now what?

A day passed between the Close Encounter of the Eli Kind and our magically enhanced date being made. I was freaking. So before the moment of truth came and smushed me like a bug I called a professional for some counseling.

“Auntie Cass?”

“Alles!” It was so good to hear her voice. Something about Cass makes me feel really secure.

“What's going on, sweetpea? I called you back but you were out.”

“Ok, I have to ask you something but you can't tell mom. I think I may have messed up. But I don't even care that I messed up because now I like the mistake I made in a way and I don't want to stop it but I'm a little freaked.”

She laughed. Gawd Cass so rocks. So I told her everything.

“Hmm.” I waited for judgment. “Well, Alles, I don't think you crossed any serious lines. You *are* too young to be doing love spells. I mean, that's advanced stuff, kiddo. They can backfire pretty hard. But it sounds like you covered your bases. I admit I'm disappointed you subverted the will of this kid, but I think he'll live. You know that was not very nice, right?”

“I know. I feel so guilty. But it was just to get back at Jasmine. She's such a cow. Just don't tell mom, ok?”

Cass laughed again. She has a great laugh. “Yeah, well. It's not like she didn't pull the same thing. How do you think she got her prom date?”

Have I mentioned I love Cass? We chatted for like an hour about what to wear. How cool is that? She recommended pink rather than red. I've got hair that isn't red, just sort of tawny with copper in it. My eyes are green, and pink looks better on me. So she basically picked out my wardrobe for me on the phone, long distance. By the time we hung up I was done bugging and looking forward to Valentine's

Day for the first time I could ever remember.

Penny was equally wiggled and called later. She was trying to pretend she was psyched for me, but we both kinda knew it was for her. I knew she liked Jared. I mean, it's almost a law somewhere that if you have an older brother and a best friend there will be some crushing going on. And Jared could be ok when he wasn't being a total butt monkey.

So Valentine's Day came. And study hall came. And my moment of triumph was at hand. I think somehow Jasmine must have heard from her brother about what happened at the cafe, because she was avoiding me like the plague. But there was nowhere to hide in assigned-seating study.

“So, Jasmine, are you going to the bonfire?”

She ignored me. Her two toadies were whispering. I was no way letting it go.

“I was thinking you could give me my tennis bracelet there if you don't have it now.”

Still ignoring me, but she's turning a pretty cool shade of purple over there. Revenge isn't just sweet. It's like triple chocolate brownie with caramel sauce sweet.

“Jas? You need your hearing checked?”

*“You are a sick, freaky slimeball, Alessandra Kincaid!”*

I was actually shocked at the anger in her voice. I mean, I hated her and it was mutual, but she seemed pretty freaked out. She reached into her bag and flung something shiny at me. The diamond tennis bracelet nearly hit me in the face.

Jasmine was quiet, red faced, and weirdly cold for the rest of study hall. When her friends tried to get her to talk she snapped at them. I sat there staring at her tennis bracelet. It was real, not diamonerds or anything. I should have felt all triumphant, I guess, but I didn't.

I felt a little like a jerk. As the hour ticked by I kept glancing at Jasmine and her face kept getting splotchier. I wasn't sure why she was reacting the way she was, but something about it felt wrong and kind of... bad. Like there was more going on than I knew, but I knew there was more. I know it makes

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no sense, but it does, you know?

I was sort of over it by the end of the day. Sort of. Ok, it still bothered me a little. But I had a date to get ready for, and before long that was all I was thinking about.

Eli Barry. He was my Valentine's Day date. This being a witch thing had its benefits!

Penny came over and we got ready together. Jared left a note for me on the kitchen table saying we'd be going to Wired for a snack and coffee before we went to the Bonfire. The Valentine's Day Bonfire was a pretty cool tradition in Carrington. Firefighters controlled it, supervised it, and sold hot chocolate and chestnuts to throw on the fire in a booth in the beach parking lot. The money went to charity. It was actually one of the few non-suckified events for kids in town. Go figure, somebody got it right.

So I wore pink, my best butt-reducing jeans, and a pink-white-black-and-dark rose scarf. It got cold on the beach in February. Penny did my eyes for me because I totally suck at makeup. She had her jet-black hair-- so long and shiny, I love Pen's hair!-- piled up in a cool kind of spray with chinese chopsticks in it. She looked great in dark red and a long black skirt with black boots. We were stylin'! Ok... we were stylin' for us.

Time flew and way before I was ready Jared was stomping up the stairs to see if we were ready. It was a little strange to see him look at Pen like a guy looks at a girl, but she really did look great. Wow. Where did *that* come from? Pen and Jared?

I probably could have done an hour of worrying that bone, but before I knew it we were piling downstairs and Eli was standing there in my kitchen-- gah!-- with a single rose in his hand. He shoved it at me with a grin. Jared had one for Pen, too. We were going to put them in water but mom-- she really, really *can* be cool-- ran for bobby pins and worked the buds into our hair. Pen's looked really cool tucked on top of her head among the chopsticks and mine was anchored above my ear with a pair of bobby pins.

This was actually getting romantic. I wished I could stop thinking about the fact that it was fake, only for the night, and would never happen again. Guilt sucks. But I'd be lying if I said guilt was spoiling it totally. I'm human. I'm 15. I'm a girl. And Eli Barry is a biscuit.

He really, *really* is. I mean, we're driving to the cafe in mom's Blazer and I'm in back with *Eli Freaking Barry* and yeah, he's just way too cute. He has wavy dark hair-- not black, like Pen's, more

mahogany. He's got those incredible eyelashes that boys always seem to have and girl's never do. Dark blue eyes-- almost navy. One of his teeth overlaps just a *tiny* bit in front. It makes his smile sort of-- all-Americanish. Vulnerable. Like he had to have that small flaw or you'd explode when you looked at him.

Ok, shut up. That's why they call it a *crush*. Like your heart is crushing itself in your chest. Or maybe like something huge should fall on you and crush you before you melt into a puddle of suckitudified dorkiness.

At wired I spotted Jasmine Delacourt with her brother and a bunch of other kids I didn't know. A blond boy who might have been cute if he didn't look mean kept hanging on her. She looked miserable. I tried not to look at her much.

Somewhere along the line Jared's arm ended up around Penny. I was so busy controlling how much I allowed this to freak me out that I barely noticed when Eli's ended up draped around **me**.

Holy. Crapalicious. Crush Momentousness.

Jared wandered over to a table where a few other friends of his were sitting. It was a little creepy how he seemed to be showing Penny off.

We ended up at a table in the corner-- the same one Eli always seemed to sit at. He was looking at me a lot and it was making me nervous. I had no idea what I'd gotten myself into. This was quickly going from a dare that got out of hand to something scary. Jasmine was still looking like she wanted to cry. Jared was giving my best friend a look that didn't belong on a big brother's face. And Eli--

Eli was watching me and the way he was watching me was making my palms sweaty.

“Your brother said you like to write.”

“Yeah.” I could talk about that. Yay, Jared, a momentary departure from your geekhood. “I journal a lot. I have a blog.”

“I was going to get a blog. I have a Facebook. I don't write that much but I like to draw and I put some of them up sometimes.”

And just like that a conversation happened. Jared and Penny didn't matter, and Jasmine was her own problem, and Eli was leaning in over our macchiatos and we were just *talking*.

His parents wanted him to go to school for engineering or architecture, but he wanted to do comics and maybe commercial art to pay the bills. I didn't ever imagine that in addition to being, like, ridiculously cute, Eli was also cool. And interesting. And talented, I guess!

So before I knew it we were laughing and deciding we could do a comic together sometime-- I'd write it and he'd do the drawings. And he smelled like soap and fresh air and fabric softener. His mom must use fabric softener. Why was I even thinking about that?

We left the cafe and somehow, like a dream, ended up at the beach. The fires were lit and people were already gathering in clusters to throw chestnuts on the fires and listen to them snap. Eli got hot chocolates for us and we found a huge driftwood log to sit on. I wasn't sure what happened to Penny and Jared.

It was a perfect night. Stars everywhere. Huge moon tinted amber around the edges. Eli Barry smelling like fabric softener with his arm around me. We were still talking about comic books.

"I like some of the good manga graphic novels, but not the chibi ones." He nodded in stead of answering.

The wind blew my bangs across my face. Eli reached up and tucked a strand of hair behind my ear. He smiled his only-barely-crooked smile and reached up with both hands to anchor it there with the rose, hooking it into the bobby pins. Our faces were really close together. It was magic.

And suddenly it hit me. *It was magic*. It wasn't Eli looking at me looking at him and thinking "I really like her and I want to kiss her." It was Eli looking at me because I'd burned the candle and said the spell. It was day number three and tomorrow the spell would be broken. And it was *wrong*.

Stupid, stupid, stupid. I felt my eyes get all watery. I know-- so humiliating! I started to bolt. We weren't far from my house. I was going to just take off and run home. This was terrible. This was the worst thing I had ever done.

"Wait!" Eli grabbed me as I lunged to my feet. "Where are you going?"

I couldn't do it. I felt the tears on my face now, cooled by the ocean breeze, then dried in the bonfire's heat as the wind shifted. I felt like a big, fake, jerky liar.

“Eli I have to tell you something and don't interrupt because I've got to get it out before I throw up.” I took a breath. I looked off toward the water so I didn't have to see his face. “You know my mum and me, well, you *know* how we're witches, because your mum comes into the shop.”

“Yeah, she said you were really good when you read her cards--”

“Just let me say it, ok? I'm bugging a little here. I don't blame you if you hate me for it, but Jasmine Delacourt was bing a total skank and bet me I couldn't make you go out with me. I know it was wrong. *I know it was*. But I did a spell and bound you so you'd ask me out and you did. But I swear on my gran's grave, and I *really loved her a lot*, that it will wear off tomorrow morning--”

“I know.”

“--and you'll be normal again. I'm *wicked sorry*, Eli, I didn't even know if it would work and I never thought I'd like you this much, but-- wait. What?”

“I said I know. About the three days thing.”

It takes a lot to shut me up and even more to shock me.

“What?”

“Ok. I like you, ok? I told your brother Jared I liked you a while ago but you seemed-- I don't know-- like you were a little brainy for boys. And I'm kind of a jock. I mean, I like to draw and I thought maybe we'd have stuff in common, but I just felt like it might be weird since Jared and me are friends.”

There was a roaring sound in my ears. What was he saying?

“Then I overheard you and Penny say something at the cafe the other day--”

Oh holy crapilific suckitude in a suitcase! He *heard us*?

--and then I asked Jared about it. Then I was at your house when your aunt called and Jared told me about what you were going to do. Ok, at first I was a little pissed then I thought it was kind of cute. So I followed you out to the woods that night. Well, actually, I went out there to the old brick house and waited behind those old lilacs--”

What? *Wait.* He was *there*?

“You were the noise!” It hit me suddenly.

“Well yeah.” He grinned and turned an adorable shade of pink. “I thought you spotted me once. Anyway, your aunt and your mom told me what to do to break the spell if it really freaked me out. So this isn't a spell, Alles. This is just us.”

Something in the middle of my tummy opened up and sort of-- blossomed. Ok, lame way to say it. It was like a little ball of warmth began to grow. Like the Grinch's small heart at the end of the Christmas cartoon. Something small started spreading and feeling *amazing*.

“Eli I'm so sorry I did it. I feel totally freaked out and my mom is so going to kill me. I can't believe she *knew* and never said anything and omigod please don't hate m--”

The “m” turned into “mmm.” He kissed me. Under a pretty incredible sky on a cold beach on Valentine's Day at the Bonfires Eli Barry kissed me. He kissed me all of his own free will.

It-- what? It rocked. It was incredible. It was the best thing that had ever happened to me and it tasted like hot chocolate. And it was magic. Not the kind you make by yourself with candles and twine. A whole other kind of magic.

“I don't hate you. I *really, really* like you.”

I did not cry and after a while, and-- ahem-- another kiss or two, we headed back toward the parking lot. Mark Delacourt was standing in a clutch of guys laughing a little too loudly and quoting lines from Superbad at his buddies.

“Hey, Barry!” I think he may have been a little buzzed. Jared said he drank a lot. I was hoping he

wasn't driving when I spotted Jasmine across the way. She had very red eyes and was clinging to the blond boy with the mean face.

“Hey Mark. What's going on. You aren't driving, are you?”

Omigawd, isn't he awesome? Such a good guy!

“Nah, we walked.” He looked at me. “You're Jared's sister, right?”

I opened my mouth to answer and felt Eli's arm tighten. “This is my girlfriend, Alessandra Kincaid. She goes to school with Jas.”

***I know!!*** His *girlfriend!* Omigawd, *where is Penny?*

“Yeah, Jas is freaking over the bracelet.” Mark's face hardened. “It was my older sister's.”

I felt a little sick. Courtney Delacourt was the oldest of the siblings and died in a car accident when we were in junior high. Suddenly Jasmine seemed more sad than mean, and her brother's drinking seemed more troubling than lame.

“I didn't want it, Mark. I also didn't know--” my throat tightened and Eli's arm rubbed my back, right between my shoulders. “Look, Jasmine hates me but if I give the bracelet to Jared can he give it to you at school? You can give it back to her and we can all pretend it never happened.”

“It was a joke, Mark. I knew about it.” Eli suddenly seemed older. “I've liked Alessandra for a long time.”

They did that stupid guy thing where they nod at each other and pretend that the testosterone limits their speech. Boys are so stupid.

So we headed back to my mom's Blazer. I couldn't believe that somehow my really stupid decision had worked out so incredibly well. Eli was pulling me up tight against him as we walked, and everything in the world felt *right*.

When yeah-- a huge bucket of ice cold *wrong* came pouring down. My brother was sucking Penny's

face like he was going for the last drop of milkshake. And Penny was *hanging onto him* like a drowning woman.

Ewwwwwwwwwwww!

But hey... who am I to question the strange way love works? Eli cleared his throat-- several times, double ick-- and they broke apart with I-swear-to-gawd a *pop*. Blerg. Disgusting. Jared so looked stupid in Penny's pink lip gloss, by the way.

He looked at Eli and they tipped jaws at one another.

"I told her."

Jared looked from Eli to me. "You ok?"

"Yeah. I came clean, too." I grinned at Penny, who seemed dazed and still unclear about what we were talking about. Wow. I was impressed. Jared had game. Who knew?

"Good. Mom is going to kill you."

I didn't care. We piled into mom's Blazer and I totally made out with my *boyfriend* in the back seat while Jared drove Penny home, then dropped Eli off, too. I mean, we kept it clean and all, but serious lip-lock, you know? I can't believe I thought I knew how to kiss before.

On the way back to the house, alone in the car, Jared whistled.

"You and Pen?"

He grinned. "Yep. You ok with that?"

"Yep. You ok with me and Eli?"

"As long as the mojo is no longer working, yeah."

"I can't believe you ratted me out." I was still a little steamed.

“Well, once Eli told me and it was obvious he was freaked out a little I thought it was only fair I let mom and Cassie ease his mind.” He glanced at me in a very big-brotherly way.

Silence. He turned the blinker on at the end of our driveway.

“He really *has* liked you for a long time.”

I was going to ask why he never told me. I was going to say a lot of stuff. But you know, sometimes you need to quit while you are ahead. And I was way, way ahead.

So that's my story. This part of it, anyway. I cast a spell that didn't work because it was broken from the beginning. I learned a little bit, but don't tell my mom. She's going to be *impossible* about this. And I got a boyfriend. My first.

I guess if you're looking for the moral to the story, it's that truth should always be your guide. In the end both Eli and me-- well, we got honest with each other and that saved the day. Funny, once I confessed and *he* confessed other things seemed to become clearer, too. Like maybe Jasmine is mean as spit, but maybe she has reasons that are good enough for me to cut her a little slack on that. And wow-- Penny and Jared. I guess I can be just as clueless as anyone. But in the dark driveway, with the smell of Eli's clean jacket still lingering, and my brother looking stupidly happy, I felt really good about the two of them, too.

Truth über alles. Truth above all. I like to think my blog's name is about being honest, but also about something watching over me, too. Like there's a force bigger than me and my angsty teen crap über alles... over all. And over me, too. Truth and wisdom and peace reining über Alles Kincaid, too.

Yah, getting way too dramatic here. Whatever. I have homework to do before I get phone privileges. And I soooo want to call my boyfriend. :)

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