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Truth, Dare, Kiss or Promise

1

'TRUTH, DARE, kiss or promise?' asked Mac as he attempted to light the fire for the third time.

Becca leaned back against a rock and nuzzled her feet into the sand. 'Truth,' she said.

'OK, you have to tell us who you fancy.'

'Easy,' said Becca. 'Brad Pitt.'

'No, I mean, in the village.'

'Easy again,' said Becca. 'Ollie Axford.'

Mac's face dropped as at last the fire took hold. Although he says he's not into relationships, I reckon he's got a thing for Bec. I saw him staring at her before, when she was combing out her hair. Her hair's her best asset although she doesn't think so. She wants blonde straight hair like Gwyneth Paltrow but she looks more like a Pre-Raphaelite princess with her long Titian coloured mane and perfect alabaster skin.

'Are you honestly telling the absolute truth?' he asked.

I couldn't help but laugh. Typical boy. Just because Becca didn't say she fancied him, he thinks she must be lying.

'Yeah, the absolute real, double honest truth,' said Becca. 'Ollie Axford.'

Mac shrugged his shoulders. 'Don't know what you see in him. He's a right flash git.'

'Exactly,' said Becca. 'That's why I like him. He's different.'

I handed round the Cokes and gave Squidge the sausages to cook. I was thankful I hadn't been asked. I'd have had to say Ollie as well and Squidge wouldn't have liked that, never mind Becca. Squidge has been my boyfriend since junior school but lately, it's all felt flat, I want a bit more excitement. Squidge is so familiar; we grew up together. And it's not that I don't like him. I do, but he's become more of a mate, like family, a brother even. And who wants to snog their brother? *Ewww*. There has to be more. Becca's not the only one who's seen Ollie. Full name Orlando Axford. Son of Zac Axford, famous American rock star who lives out at Barton Hall. Everyone in the village is always on about them, they're *soooo* glamorous. They live in this fab house, more like a mansion, in acres of land with horses and dogs and they've even got a Vietnamese pot-bellied pig. I saw it once by the gate, when I went out there with my dad to deliver their groceries. Mrs Axford is totally gorgeous. She used to be a model and Ollie is the best-looking boy I've ever seen. I haven't ever spoken to him,

but I've seen him around when he's been down from school in the holidays.

'OK, your turn, Cat,' said Squidge, putting a sausage on a fork and holding it over the fire. 'Truth, dare, kiss or promise.'

I stared out at the ocean in front of us while I considered which to choose. It was the beginning of September and term started on Monday. Another summer in Cornwall gone and here we all were, the gang, having a beach party before the sun went down. Nothing wrong with any of it, I thought. It is beautiful here and we do have a laugh, it's just, is this is it? Me and Squidge going together until we leave school? No. I want more. And I want it soon.

'Dare,' I said.

Squidge grinned. 'Er, let me think of a good one. Now who we can get you to moon at . . . ?'

Typical. Even the dares are predictable: show your bum to some unsuspecting person.

'No, *no*,' said Becca. 'I have a *much* better dare.'

'You butted in,' I said. 'Show your bum. Butted in. Bum, butt, geddit?'

Mac, Squidge and Becca stared at me as though I was mad. Maybe I am. I have been feeling a bit strange lately. Probably hormones. Mrs Jeffries, our form teacher, puts everything down to that, like when anyone goes off on a wobbly, 'Oh hormones,' she says. We all have a laugh about it, like if anyone acts even slightly weird, we all go, 'It's mi

hormones playing me up something rotten.'

'Butthead,' said Becca, 'but I do have a brill dare.'

'Go on then.'

'I dare that the next time you see Ollie Axford, you have to go and talk to him.'

'*Talk* to him. Why?' I asked, fearing for a moment that Becca had sussed my secret.

Becca looked to the heavens. 'For me of course. Oh go on Cat, pleeease, you know how good you are at chatting up boys. And they always like you. Talk to him. Find out if he's noticed me. Find out if he has a girlfriend. That sort of thing, and maybe mention, kind of casually, that you have a friend who'd like to meet him.'

'No way,' I said. 'No, *no* way.'

I looked to Squidge for support.

'Oh go on Cat, if Becca has such a crush, the least you can do as a mate is help her out.'

Astounding. He's not even jealous, threatened. He's so sure of our relationship that he would send me out to chat up the most divine boy in Cornwall, if not the country, and I have his full go ahead.

'No, forget it. I'm not doing dare,' I said. 'I'll choose another one instead.'

'You can't change your mind because you don't like the dare,' objected Becca. 'That's against the rules.'

'Yeah, but what you want me to do is a dare that you should do yourself,' I said looking round at everyone,

hoping that one of them would back me up. I could see that Mac had gone into a sulk. Shame, as I really like him. He's been living down here a year now and still hasn't quite landed. He's always going on about London and how he misses his old school and his mates. His mum and dad are divorced, and he lives for the times when he gets to go back to visit his dad who still lives up there in a flat in Islington. Having Becca as a girlfriend might help him settle, and I'm sure she would have been interested if it wasn't for Ollie Axford.

I decided to help him out.

'Truth, dare, kiss or promise, Mac?' I asked.

He shrugged. 'Don't care.'

'Then I'll pick for you,' I said. 'Kiss.'

'I'm not kissing you if that's what you think,' he said, and for a moment his face lightened. 'Squidge would kill me.'

'I never said *who* you have to kiss yet,' I said. 'No, you have to kiss Becca.'

'Cat!' said Becca looking shocked. Usually when we played the kiss option, it was to kiss someone geeky at school or one of the ancient locals. One time when we couldn't think of anyone, Becca made Squidge go and kiss a dustbin.

'OK, it has to be at a time when it feels right,' I said backtracking fast.

'That'll be never, then,' said Mac settling back into his sulk. 'And anyway, you haven't really had a proper go, Cat.'

'OK. Truth then,' I said.

'Tell us your biggest secret,' said Becca.

'Wouldn't be a secret then, would it?' I said playing for time.

'Rules are rules and you ducked out of the dare I gave you,' said Becca. 'Come on, spill.'

'OK,' I said, 'but how about I only tell you? There's nothing in the rules that says I have to tell everyone.'

'Fair enough,' said Squidge. 'I know all your secrets anyway.'

Mac shrugged. 'Whatever,' he said turning away and looking out to sea. I think he was pleased that I'd opted out of the dare.

Two packs of sausages, burgers and Cokes later, we set off on the long climb back up the cliff.

'Shouldn't have had that last sausage,' panted Becca after we'd been going ten minutes.

'Almost there,' I said coming up behind her on the path. We stopped for a moment to catch our breath and look at the view stretching out in front of us. Miles and miles of coastline as far as Rame Head. Even though I was born here, I still love watching the sea down below as it breaks on the sand making patterns like white lace.

Squidge and Mac had gone on ahead and had almost reached the top so I decided to tackle Becca while I had her alone.

'Don't you like Mac?' I asked.

Becca pulled her hair up into a ponytail and set off again. 'Yeah, course. But not like that. Besides he's not into having a girlfriend and certainly doesn't fancy me. I could kill you doing that kiss thing on me. Why would you want to set me up with him?'

'I thought you'd like it. I mean, he's your type. Blond, cute smile and he's a laugh most of the time.'

'Ah, but I've set my sights higher,' she said dreamily. 'Ollie Axford. He's The One.'

'That's this week. Last week Phil was The One.'

'Phil Davies? *Ew.* No way,' said Becca. 'Phil was a minor blip in my game plan.'

I had to laugh. No half measures for Becca. She was always in love. Every new boy she had a crush on was 'The One'. I wasn't sure how seriously to take this new infatuation with Ollie. Was it one of her whims or was she for real this time?

As I set off again another thought occurred to me. Why *was* I trying to get her off with Mac? Was it because I wanted the way free, so I could talk to Ollie for me not her?

'Bec.'

'What?'

'I'll tell you my secret now.'

'What?' said Becca stopping again.

'Promise you won't say anything?'

She nodded.

'I think I want to finish with Squidge.' Actually it wasn't my biggest secret. My biggest secret was that I fancied Ollie. But I was careful to omit the word *biggest* and hoped she wouldn't notice.

Becca turned. 'You're kidding. No wonder you didn't want to say in front of the others. But why? I mean you two have been an item since . . . for ever.'

'Exactly. Before the dawn of time, etc.'

'So why now? Has he done something to upset you?'

I laughed. 'Nah.' Squidge would never do anything to upset anyone. He's the nicest person I know. Kind and considerate. Wouldn't harm a fly. Always the first to offer help. Generous. Cool. Cute even. The perfect boyfriend. 'I want a change.'

Becca stared at me. 'Is that why you cut all your hair off?'

'You don't like it do you?'

'I *love* it. It's loads better. It makes your hair look really dark and glossy.' We walked on for a bit then Becca turned again. 'Do you fancy someone else? Is that why you want to finish with Squidge?'

I really wanted to tell her, yes, yes I *do*: Ollie. But I couldn't do it. 'Nah,' I said, 'there's nobody else. I just want to move on.'

Becca glanced up at the top of the cliff where the boys were waiting.

'He's going to be devastated. He adores you.'

I followed Becca's glance and Squidge waved down at us. Squidge, lovely lovely Squidge. My pal through thick and thin. He's been there for me in all the good and bad times. Times like when my mum died when I was nine. I've known him that long.

'So when are you going to do it?'

'Don't know,' I said.

'And how? What on earth are you going to say?'

'Double don't know.' I felt awful. I didn't want to hurt him. How was I ever going to find the right words?

2 Storm in a Teen Cup

'THE TOOTH fairy's not been,' blubbed Emma, as she scrabbled about under her pillow and found the tooth she'd left wrapped in tissue the night before.

I jumped down from the top bunk and went to look for Dad.

'Go away,' snuffled Luke from under his duvet when I poked my head in the boys' room. 'Dad's gone to the market.'

I went to Dad's desk, found a piece of card, scribbled an 'I Owe You' note, then sprinkled it with glitter.

Emma wasn't convinced when I handed it to her.

'The tooth fairy's a bit broke at the moment,' I explained. 'So many children to get round. When she's paid her overdraft off at the Fairy Bank, no doubt she'll be in touch.'

Emma looked like she was going to start crying again, so I found my bag and handed her the Smarties I'd bought yesterday.

'She left you these as well.'

She looked suspiciously at my bag as if to say how come she left them in *your* bag, but she took them, then stuck a couple up her nose. It's her latest game. She sticks sweets up her nose, then snorts them across the room. D'oh thanks, Emma, I thought as I flicked a sticky red one off my arm.

I went downstairs and laid the table for breakfast. That was when Joe (brother number two) decided to experiment with his juice by standing on his head and trying to drink upside down.

Course Emma had to try it as well, but couldn't get up on her head so started doing her whiney act.

At that moment, we heard a loud thump from upstairs. It was Luke, who appeared minutes later rubbing his arm. He'd tried to fly off the top bunk bed. Luckily nothing was broken.

It was then I spied Mogley the cat looking anxiously out of the window of the spin-dryer.

'Eeep!' I squeaked.

'It's her house,' said Emma. 'She likes it.'

As Mogley was frantically scratching to get out, somehow I doubted that. I opened the dryer and pulled her out from amongst the damp laundry and she purred happily in my arms. I was thankful that I'd got to her before anyone had switched it on.

There was peace for about ten minutes as we tucked into rounds of toast and honey, then I sent them off to get

dressed. Or so I thought. It wasn't long before Joe came mumbling into the kitchen. He'd glued his back teeth together. He was sticking something down for his science project and put the glue tube in his mouth while he used his hands.

I gave him a glass of milk to swill round his mouth and, thank God, his teeth unlocked, but when Dad came back, the house was pandemonium. Emma wanted to do the glue trick to try and pull more of her teeth out, the laundry was all over the table where I'd been trying to remove the cat hairs, there was juice all over the floor from Joe's upside down drinking experiment and, next door, Luke had the telly on full blast.

'I can't leave you alone for five minutes,' said Dad taking in the scene before him. 'And look at you Cat, you're not even out of your pyjamas yet and it's already nine o'clock.'

'But . . .' I started.

'No buts about it,' said Dad. 'It's about time all of you learnt to behave properly.'

Sometimes I give up. But then, it's nothing new. It's only another typical Saturday morning in the Kennedy household.

'Cat, I need you to go into Kingsand and pick up a few things,' said Dad giving me a list later that morning.

'But Dad, I was going to go over to Becca's,' I began.

'You can go this afternoon, morning's for jobs.'

I couldn't argue as the others were all busy with their chores. Chores that no doubt I'd have to do again for them when I got back. Joe and Luke's idea of tidying their bedroom is to hide everything under their duvets. I'm forever clearing out old sweet wrappers, video games and assorted bits of clothing when they fall into bed at night.

I set off to the village and bought the items Dad wanted from the shop. There weren't many people about, only the occasional tourist strolling through the lanes admiring the coloured sandstone cottages and pots of flowers displayed everywhere. Kingsand prides itself on its appearance and has won the 'Best Kept Village' award many times.

I made my way down the narrow pavement towards the bay at the bottom. I wouldn't like to live here, I thought, as I gazed into some of houses lining the lane. It must be like this all the time – having strangers pass by and stare into your living room. In one window, a family sat around the table as their mum gave them breakfast. I turned away. Sometimes it still hurts seeing cosy families with a mum. I wonder if they know how lucky they are.

I decided to walk through the village to the next bay at Cawsand. Kingsand and Cawsand are twin villages, right next to each other, both with sandy bays that are easy to get to. Before she was ill, Mum used to bring us to Cawsand Bay as it's safe for swimming. We'd sit for hours watching the boats and people playing on the beach.

I made my way through the village, then down into the square at Cawsand, then turned into the bay. There were only a couple of people: a woman having a coffee at the café and a boy at the far end of the beach.

I went and sat by the rocks on the left and stared out at the sea. Some days I really miss mum. Most of the time I'm OK. I'm fourteen and I know she's gone and not coming back. But some days I don't feel so grown up and I wish she was here and I could cuddle up and feel looked after. Being grown-up can be confusing sometimes and I don't know what I want. I'm sure she'd have understood. Must be mi old hormones playing me up, I thought, as I brushed away a tear.

Suddenly the boy from the other end of the beach plonked himself down next to me on the sand. I'd been so caught up in my thoughts that I hadn't heard him approaching.

'It is lovely here isn't it?' he said, indicating the bay with a sweep of his hand.

I looked round at him and my chest tightened.

Ohmigo-o-o-od. It was Ollie Axford. Ollie Axford sitting right next to me in a black T-shirt and shorts. He stretched long tanned legs out in front of him. Totally, totally gorgeous. Jet black hair, denim blue eyes and a cute dimple on his chin.

'Cat got your tongue.' He was smiling.

I realised I must have been staring at him. Ogling, more like.

'Actually that's my name.'

He looked puzzled.

'Cat. Short for Catherine, but everyone calls me Cat.'

'Nice,' he said looking me up and down in a way that made me blush. 'That's a nice name. Suits you. You look like a cat sitting here on your own. You don't scratch do you?'

I laughed. 'Only if provoked. Then I bite as well.'

He grinned and raised an eyebrow. 'Oh really. Sounds dangerous. So I'd better be nice. Will you purr if I stroke you?'

And he began to gently stroke my arm. Ohmigod, ohmigod, *ohmigod.*

'We have cats up at the house,' he continued. 'They're very independent, aren't they? Are you like that?'

'Suppose I can be.'

He leaned close. 'But they can be very affectionate as well if they like you.'

I laughed. 'Yeah, but you have to be deserving.'

I couldn't believe it. I was flirting with him and he was flirting back. Ollie Axford. And me. On the beach. On our own. *Arghhhh.*

'Then I'd better be extra nice, hadn't I? Because I like cats,' he said. 'I'm Ollie by the way. Ollie Axford.'

'I know.'

He turned his head and looked at me quizzically causing my chest to tighten even more. I could hardly breath.

'How?'

'Oh, everyone knows who you are. You live at Barton Hall, don't you?'

He nodded. 'Yeah. How do you know that?'

'My dad owns the shop over in the next village. Um, your mum comes in sometimes.'

He seemed to be happy with that. 'So Cat. What do you do around here?'

'Do like what? What do you mean?'

He settled himself back against my rock so that his arm was touching mine. 'Tell me everything. Who you are. What you're doing here all on your own.'

'Er . . .' What could I say to make it interesting? He seemed to be enjoying my discomfort.

'OK, start with where you go to school.'

'Near Torpoint. Everyone round here goes there pretty well.'

'Oh yeah, Torpoint. My sister's going to go there.'

'Your sister?'

'Yeah, she starts on Monday. She was at school in London but hated it. She wanted to be closer to home, so Mum and Dad got her changed.'

Now this *was* interesting. I'd heard that he had a sister but I'd never seen her. Maybe he was going to change schools as well. That would cause a stir. Ollie Axford at our school. I couldn't wait to tell Becca. She'd think she'd died and gone to heaven. Ohmigod. Becca. I remembered the dare that I'd turned down, but now I had the perfect

opportunity. I had to mention her or she'd kill me when I told her that I'd bumped into Ollie. I sat up so that we weren't touching any more.

'And, er, are you going to change schools as well?'

'No way,' he said. 'I like my school. But look out for Lia, will you? That's my sister. She's a good kid and you know, starting a new school can be a bit daunting sometimes.'

He seemed nice. I liked that he was watching out for his sister.

'I'll make a point of it,' I said. 'How old is she?'

'Fourteen, so she'll be going into Year Nine.'

'That's my year. So yeah, I'll watch out for her.'

Ollie leaned up so that he was touching me again. 'But what about you? You haven't told me much yet.'

I shrugged. 'Not a lot to tell. I grew up here. I've got two stupid brothers and a sister who I think may be an alien.'

'Older or younger?'

'Younger. Luke's ten, Joe's eight and Emma's the baby, she's just turned six. You?'

'Two sisters. One older, Star – she's up in London. And Lia.'

'Two? Bet they spoil you being an only boy.'

'I wish. And are you married, single or divorced?'

'Divorced,' I said. 'He got the kids, I kept the houses.'

He laughed. 'Seriously, though.'

'Um . . . there's a gang of us that hang out, you know.