

Elaine

I, Elaine O’Dea, am going to tell you two definite, absolute, indisputable truths.

1. Alice Franklin slept with two guys *in the very same night* in a bed IN MY HOUSE this past summer, just before the start of junior year. She slept with one and then, like, five minutes later, she slept with the other one. Seriously. And everybody knows about it.
2. Two weeks ago – just after Homecoming – one of those guys, Brandon Fitzsimmons (who was crazy super popular and gorgeous and who yours truly messed around with more than once) died in a car accident. And it was all Alice’s fault.

The other guy Alice slept with was this college guy, Tommy Cray, who used to go to Healy High. I’ll get to Healy in a

minute, and Brandon dying, too, but first, I should probably tell you about Alice.

It's weird, because *Alice Franklin* doesn't sound like a slutty name. It sounds like the name of a girl who takes really super good Chem notes or volunteers at the Healy Senior Center on Friday nights passing out punch and cookies or whatever it is they do at the Healy Senior Center on a Friday night. Speaking of old people, Alice sounds like a total grandma name. Like tissues-tucked-in-the-sleeves, I-can't-find-my-purse, what-time-is-*Jeopardy!*-on-again grandma. But that's totally not Alice Franklin. Hell no.

Because Alice Franklin is a slut.

She's not *overtly* slutty looking or whatever, but her look could go either way. She's a little taller than average but not freakishly tall, and I totally admit she has a really good figure. She never has to worry about her weight. Maybe her mom makes her count Weight Watchers points with her like mine does, but then again I don't think so, because Alice's mom doesn't seem to care that the entire town thinks her daughter is a total ho. I don't know if Alice's dad would care because Alice hasn't had a dad for as long as I've known her. Which is forever.

Alice has short hair that's cut sort of pixie-style, and she's one of those girls with naturally full lips. She always, always has raspberry-colored lipstick and lip liner on. Her face is standard pretty. She has multiple piercings in both ears,

but she's not weird or punk or whatever; I guess she just likes a lot of earrings. In fact, she kind of dresses up for school. Or at least she did before all of this went down. She liked to wear pencil skirts and tight tops which showed off her boobs, and she'd always have on these open-toed sandals that showed off her raspberry toenails. Like, even in February.

After it all happened, it's like she didn't care what she looked like. At first she came to school dressed all normal, but lately she's been showing up in jeans and a sweatshirt with the hood up lots of the time. She still wears the lipstick, though, which I find weird.

She hasn't ever been super crazy popular like me (I know that comes out conceited, but it's just the truth), but she's never been like that freak show Kurt Morelli who has an IQ of five hundred and forty and never talks to anyone except the teachers. If you're thinking of popularity as an apartment building, somebody like me is sitting on the roof of the penthouse, the band geeks are sleeping on the floor in the basement, and Kurt Morelli isn't living in the building at all. And I guess Alice Franklin has spent most of her life on some middle floor somewhere, but on the top of the middle.

So she was cool enough to come to my party.

You need to understand that this thing with Alice sleeping with two guys and Brandon dying in a car accident are *the* two biggest things to go down in Healy in a really super crazy long time. I don't mean just big with the kids who go to

Healy High. I mean big with, like, everyone. You know how there's this whole world that exists only to teenagers, and adults never know what's going on there? I think even the adults are aware of this phenomenon. Even they realize that they don't know what a certain word means or why a certain show is popular or, like, how they always get so excited to show you a YouTube video with a cat sneezing that you already saw twenty hundred years ago or whatever.

But Alice sleeping with two guys and then Brandon dying has become part of the whole world of Healy. Moms have talked about it with other moms at meetings of the Healy Boosters, they've asked their daughters about it, and they've looked at Alice's mom in the grocery store with a look that's always, 'I feel so sorry for you, you terrible, terrible mother.' (I know this because my mother has done all these things, including staring at Alice's mother in the dairy aisle while looking for some fat-free pudding she'd heard about at a Weight Watchers meeting. The pudding was only two points, so of course my mother was nuts for it.)

And this thing about Brandon dying is even crazier because he was Brandon Fitzsimmons, King of Healy, Texas. Quarterback and totally handsome and funny and everybody knew him. The dads have been talking about it at meetings of the Healy Boosters and in line at the Auto Zone, and they shake their heads and say what a damn shame it is that Brandon Fitzsimmons had to die in a car accident just a few

weeks into football season. (I know this because my father has done all of these things, including wondering out loud why that Alice Franklin Slut, as he put it, had to go and mess up Healy's best chance at the 3A State Championship since he played for the Tigers back in, like, 1925.)

Football is enormous in Healy, but Healy itself is not. It's basically the kind of place that is just far enough away from the city that it can't really be considered a suburb, but it's not big enough to be considered much more than just a small town. There are two grocery stores, three drugstores, and, like, five billion churches located in strip malls. The movie theater shows one movie at a time, so you never get a new one, and the big thing to do on the weekends if you're under twenty is go get fast food and beers and park in the Healy High parking lot and talk shit about people or hope that someone's parents go out of town so you can have a party. Most people either love it here and never plan on leaving, or they hate it here and can't wait to go.

Healy isn't as bad as it sounds. I know it's totally lame that the biggest store is a Walmart and we have to drive an hour and ten minutes to go to a real mall, but still, I love it. I guess, yeah, it's all I know, but I love walking into almost any store in town and people know me and smile at me, and they ask me about my mom and dad and they ask me if I'm on the varsity dance squad this year (yes) and if I'm planning on being on the junior prom committee (yes) and if I think

Healy has a chance at state (always). And the things I do seem to be the things that everyone else at Healy High wants to do. Like when my girlfriends and I were freshmen and we started using toothpicks to write letters on our nails with fingernail polish, so we could spell out ten-digit messages like I AM SO CUTE! and SCHOOL SUX! In about a week practically every other freshman girl at Healy High was copying us.

But back to Alice Franklin.

In the movies, high school parties are always these huge, crazy events with five hundred kids jammed into one house and naked people jumping from the roof into the pool, but in reality, high school parties are nothing like this. At least not in Healy. Healy parties basically consist of people sitting around the living room drinking, texting each other from across the room, watching television, and every once in a while someone goes into the kitchen to get another beer. Sometimes two people will go upstairs to one of the bedrooms and everyone makes a joke about it, and around midnight or one a.m. people pass out on the couch or go home.

Not so exciting sounding, I know, but I suppose what makes them exciting is the possibility that one of these nights, at one of these parties, something will happen.

And I guess that something did.