



# strange things

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# Strange Things


One ...10

Two ...15

Three ...20

Four ...25

Five ...35



To my mother,  
Aunt Allison, and  
cousin Alaena, who  
always encourage my  
taste in strange things.

“I can’t remember  
any dreams in my life.  
There’s so much strange  
in real life that it often  
seems like a dream.” -  
Tim Burton

# One

“C’mon Cherisa, when was the last time you did something stupid?” I shoved a spoonful of Lucky Charms into my mouth and I squinted at the bad paint job on the pantry door when I heard those famous last words. I realize now that I probably should have hung up the phone right then and there. It’s obviously a sign that whatever you’re about to agree to isn’t something you want to be involved in. And me, being thirty years old, should have known this, but I hadn’t spoken to Adelaide in six months, so I stupidly continued with this lame conversation.

“Laide, I have a six year old. I do something stupid every damn day,” I said as I wiped off some milk that had dribbled down my chin, and I glanced at the muted Weather Channel on the small television sitting on the corner of the kitchen counter – clear skies and cold temperatures for the rest of the night.

“No, no – I mean, on purpose.”

I squinted at the television screen in response. This would’ve been another grand opportunity to hang up on my delusional friend and call Jax to make sure he hadn’t let Finn wander out into the middle of the street while trick-or-treating again. She did that two years ago because she saw a dead squirrel, and almost got hit by our neighbors’ Sudan...because unlike me, my dim-witted husband and daughter seem to purposefully do stupid things.

Apparently catching an Eevee on Jax’s

Pokemon Go app was more important than watching our four year old, who’s always had a fascination with collecting animals, whether they were wildlife, road kill, or pets that passed away, and keeping rodents and strays as pets as well as collecting dead animal bones.

She had bird, chipmunk, rat, mouse, squirrel, hamster, and gerbil skeletons stuffed into little zip-lock bags... and I would find them underneath all of her clothes in her black dresser. She told me that this was all with the intention of making jewelry with the bones - a statement that I didn’t necessarily believe.

However, I put up with this for a while because God knew that I had my strange hobbies as a child and teenager, but on her fifth birthday in June, I had to put my foot down because I found our old calico, Mr. Fuzz-Butt, in a shoebox underneath her bed three months af-

-ter he'd passed away. I could smell flesh rotting in the summer heat inside of her room and I almost puked all over her purple carpet. We had buried him in the backyard after the vet put him down due to cancer in his kidneys – but Finn had dug him back up shortly after. She wanted to “mummify and keep him.”

The fact that she even knew what the word “mummify” meant scared the ever-living shit out of me, but obviously she didn't know how to properly perform mummification on the poor, dead pet, and I wasn't about to try.

However... she screamed for a solid hour when I tried to take Mr. Fuzz-Butt away from her, so I compromised, and he found his new home in the basement because Finn loved that cat when he was alive...and apparently she loved his dead body just as equally. I shuddered and realized that maybe I do stupid things on

purpose too. “I don't know, I guess letting my daughter collect live and dead animals was a pretty stupid thing that I did on purpose,” I replied. I heard a nervous chuckle on the line.

“You're kidding right?” I took another mouthful of cereal, then waved my spoon in front of my face and away from the phone as I chewed obnoxiously.

“Sure,” I replied while hearing one of Finn's pet rats squeak, and then watching it crawl around on the kitchen floor. It was one of the grey, fatter ones – probably looking for food. I threw a Lucky Charms rainbow marsh-mellow at it, and it went right for it. I didn't feel like picking him up and putting him back in his cage, so to hell with it.

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“And I guess drinking absinthe while we

were studying abroad in Italy was pretty stupid,” I added to break the awkward silence with a sigh, partially due to how annoyed I was as well as remembering who I used to be before I met Jax.



## Two

I was newly twenty-one, and standing in the corner of this run-down, dimly lit basement of a fraternity house, with a bottle of Peroni beer in one hand, and my iPhone in the other. The air was stuffy and it reeked of cigarettes, farts, sweat, and alcohol. I had no makeup on, but I was showing off my nose, septum, belly button, tongue, and eyebrow piercings, as well as 4 earring holes per ear, and a cartilage piercing. My wavy blonde hair was dyed black and it flowed down to my hips. My nails were painted dark purple and I wore a ring on every single finger. You could say I was trying to look like a rebel, but I honestly wasn't – it's just what I liked.



However, Adelaide (who loved to dye her hair bright red, wear sundresses that showed off her shoulder tattoos, walk around in bare feet, and apply heavy, thick black eyeliner on the top lids of her eyes) was actually a rebel and avid partygoer, so obviously, she suggested we hit up a party while we were supposed to be studying for an exam in Italy. I stupidly said: “Well, that sounds like a great idea.”

And it ended up with Adelaide boringly flirting with two Italian fraternity boys right next to me while I chewed my hair and slowly drank my beer. I always liked the taste of my hair – more so than the beer. It was sweet and crunchy. I liked the gritty way it felt against my teeth and the way it stuck to my tongue.

“What you do?” One of the boys with bushy blonde hair and chocolate brown eyes suddenly asked me in an Italian accent. My

head snapped up as I realized that he was looking directly at me. I raised my thin eyebrows at the muscular man, spat a chunk of my hair out of my mouth, and pointed at my black lace crop-top.

“Me? Did I do something?” I asked and he shook his head. My brown eyes lit up with recognition, and I chewed dead skin off of my lower lip, causing it to bleed a little.

“Um...oh, I sometimes go to libraries just to smell the inside of books,” I said while sucking on my lip. He slowly nodded like he didn’t quite understand, and Adelaide rolled her eyes at my attempt at flirting and took a swig of her drink. “The older ones smell really good sometimes,” I added pathetically.

Adelaide swallowed, stared at me with judgment for exactly two seconds, and turned back to the boys. “She’s into photography,”

she said with a smile, and then turned the attention back to her. I felt like slapping myself in the face as I shrunk back into my corner – why didn’t I just start off with photography? Why did I go straight to the book thing?

I felt light-headed, and my chest tightened from embarrassment, so I forced myself to take a deep breath, close my eyes, and visualize my happy place. And suddenly, I was alone in my small apartment. I was wearing baggy red flannel in my underwear, sitting on top of a pile of clothes in my small walk-in closet with the door shut, watching a comfort show on my laptop (usually *Gossip Girl*), drawing all over my hands and forearms with a black sharpie, taking a pen and playing connect-the-dots with the freckles on my thighs, re-reading *Harry Potter* during commercial breaks, and looking through the pictures on my camera.

After I returned my focus to the basement, feeling more relaxed – I finished my beer and bopped my head along to the dubstep music. Then I remembered that the other frat boy, a very drunk, twenty-something-year-old, skinny guy who could’ve benefited from shaving his face, eating twenty mints, and using a spritz of colon – handed me a green bottle of absinthe and said, “Chase beer with that, yes?”

I had no idea what absinthe was, and I figured Adelaide would know since she was more experienced with alcohol than I was. So, naturally, I shoved the bottle into her hand without a word. She studied it for a moment, shrugged, said ‘fuck it – we’ll be fine,’ and then she started to chug it. And by the end of the night – Adelaide and I drank about half a bottle each... now, for those who don’t know, absinthe has pretty strict regulations in most



places because of its alcohol content. It has to be very diluted in order to be drink-able. Apparently this bottle wasn't very diluted.

Needless to say, the next day, our wildly hung-over asses heard stories about Adelaide hooking up with both of those guys then promptly puking into a large vase (that already had a plant in it), as well as stories about me ripping off my crop top (And I hadn't been wearing a bra because I was a strong believer in “#freethenipple”), singing “This is Halloween” from the Nightmare Before Christmas over and over, and demanding that everyone touch my new silver skull belly button ring... which eventually turned into an invitation for everyone to touch everywhere.

And that's who I was, ladies and gentlemen: your weird, goth girl gone wild.



# Three

While I reminisced, I heard a throaty laugh at the other end of the ph line. “That was literally nine years ago... but I guess the large consequences of that night are worthy of labeling it as your last big mistake as of late.”

“L-O-L,” I spelled out unenthusiastically as I took another bite of cereal and thought about the thousand different things that I could be doing right now instead of debating whether or not to purposefully do something stupid – like... fixing that fucking paint job on the pantry door, for instance.

“So, c’mon, Cher – it’s Halloween. Fletcher and I are on the east coast for the weekend...let’s do something stupid! Why don’t we all go out to the old Watson house later tonight?” My left thumb twisted the small diamond wedding ring on my finger and adjusted my silver nose ring. I always got the goose bumps whenever I heard someone mention “the old Watson house.” I’d never actually visited – I’d only heard stories...creepy stories.

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It was your typical 2-story abandoned haunted house – out in the middle of bumble-fuck, somewhat near the highway, surrounded by tall grass and oak trees. It had a black tiled roof covered with random burn-holes due to how many times the building had caught fire over the years.

The wood covering the outside of the

house was darkened, decayed, and covered with mold, vines, and ivy that decided to grow on top, and around, it.

Ominous black streak-marks dripped from the roof to the ground due rain, and all seven windows surrounding the house were completely shattered, the front door was missing, the porch contained one sole grey rocking chair, and the driveway was long, winding, unpaved, and covered with rocks.

I’d passed by this house only a handful of times while driving Finn to her doctor’s office, and every single time I passed it, I felt like there was something pressing hard against my chest. The air would feel heavier, I would get that pins-and-needles feeling on the tips of my fingers and toes.

It was just overall strange – and I used to be into weird things... but I scared easily.

There would be a moment of silence and then Finn would always, without fail, comment with her high-pitched voice in the back-seat with something like:

“I wish I could get her bones, can we stop?” And I would try to mentally prepare myself by taking a deep breath, and then I’d shake my head and reply with:

“No, what are you talking about?”

And she would say:

“Goody Adams. Can’t you hear her screaming inside, mommy? I want her bones.” At this point, I’d realize that mentally preparing myself never worked, my palms would sweat, and I’d tighten my grip on the steering wheel. I would imagine myself strangling whoever taught Finn about Salem’s dark history in school, even though every time I brought it up with the school board, they would deny the

the lesson ever occurring. I would hold my breath, glance in the rear-view mirror, and catch those big, dark brown eyes staring back at me.

“No baby, I can’t, and I don’t like it when you make up these kinds of stories.”

“It’s true! They’re gonna bury her after she burns – but I want her – I want to keep her bones,” I’d press my foot harder on the gas pedal of my SUV, grind my teeth together, and just stare into the rear-view mirror at my curly, dark-brown haired daughter with pale skin and a short, skinny body.

She had her father’s bony legs that were folded in a pretzel position in her car seat, and she would be sitting on her feet.

She’d have her pretty face plastered against the right backside window, her nose squished against the glass, hot breath fogging

up the window, and fingers twirling her long, curly hair that she inherited from moi.

“Why would you want her bones, Finn?”

I would ask, trying to keep fear out of my tone. I understood making jewelry out of animal bones...but human ones? What could she possibly want with human bones? I could hear her tiny fingernail tap on the window – she was pointing at that house.

“Because I don’t have any people bones,” she would casually reply, “and the inside has plenty.”



# Four

I pressed the home phone hard against my right ear, glared down at my watery cereal bowl, and cleared my throat so there was no chance Adelaide could misunderstand me.

“Look Laide, I still have candy to hand out to sticky-fingered neighbor kids, laundry to finish, dishes to wash, and no energy to do any of it. Not to mention that my fore-mentioned five year old also happens to be on the east coast and should be home with my husband in a few hours. I don’t have time for this,” I explained at length. I heard Laide sigh on the other end, and I could picture her famous headshake that she’d give me whenever I tried to talk her out of doing something. The headshake that stated: “No matter what you say, I’m going to

make you do it anyway.” She never did understand the concept of actually being an adult.

“The old Watson house is epic, dude. Hundreds of people died there, and people refuse to tear it down in fear of upsetting the Devil himself. You’ve been living in Salem for six years now, how is it that you still haven’t seen this house?” she asked, completely ignoring everything I had just said. Typical Laide.

I squished the phone in between my right shoulder and ear, accidentally pressing a button as I did so, and grabbed the TV remote lying in between the cereal box and Finn’s fake vampire teeth on the kitchen table. I jammed my thumb down on the power button hard, then scooted my chair back.

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I had technically seen the old Watson house, but I’ve never gotten close to it. Beside the fact that my daughter could hear dead people screaming inside... my husband just wasn’t into Halloween or creepy things, and it brushed off onto me over the years. He was a bland guy, but I guess that’s what I loved about him. Jax was surprisingly accepting of my weirdness, but once we got married and had Finn, things changed a bit.

All of a sudden, he became uninterested in physical contact with me and most of my belongings looked like clutter to him – he hated clutter more than anything. So I compromised again to please him, and gave away all of my Halloween and gothic junk throughout the year I was pregnant with Finn.

I also got rid of the majority of my printed photographs that I’d taken over the years because he didn’t think they matched “our new décor” of plainness. And at that point, I was already a stay-at-home mother while Jax worked – like he wanted – so I wasn’t going to go into photography – why bother keeping the photographs?

And why bother visiting the Watson house if I wasn’t into it anymore?

“We’re living in Salem because it’s where Jax is employed. He also wanted to live

closer to his family, and I compromised – we’re not here because it’s haunted,” I corrected her as I stood up from my wooden chair and walked over to the kitchen sink.

“I’m not sure you fully understand what the word compromise means – but whatever. C’mon Cher, live a little. You used to love the wild life,” Adelaide replied. I shook my head, trying to will away the regret I felt for settling down too early.

“Laide, look, I really gotta go,” I said, placing my cereal bowl inside the sink and then running water over it. I heard her sigh.

“Okay, fine, but before you do... when was the last time you actually did something for yourself?” she suddenly asked.

I was taken slightly off-guard by this question and I straightened back up. I turned the faucet off, thought hard, and tapped a polish-

-less broken fingernail on the edge of the dirty sink. “Does my wedding day count?” I asked. I heard another sigh.

“You gave birth to Jax’s only living daughter the very next day, so yeah – six years ago was the last time you actually did something that YOU wanted to do, dude,” she said. I sighed and glanced down at myself, while thinking, to see a grey t-shirt with an old ketchup-stain on it, a chubby stomach that I never got rid of after Finn was born, and black sweatpants I’d probably worn for the third time this week.

I suddenly felt extremely disgusted with myself – how long had I actually looked like this? No wonder my husband didn’t seem interested in having sex with me anymore – I was a run-down mother who had let her body go, had no personality, and no social life.

I suddenly realized that it had gotten to

the point where playing video games, whenever he wasn’t managing the Hampton Inn hotel five minutes from the house, looked more appealing to Jax than I did.

“When are you coming to pick me up?” I suddenly asked Adelaide.

...And that’s when I heard the front door close. I jumped slightly because I hadn’t even realized that it had been opened. I turned around and looked out into the dark hallway to find Finn walking up to me with a completely white-painted face with bright red lips, slicked-back hair in a ponytail (besides a few dark brown strands hanging in her face), and a black vampire cape tied around her neck and flowing over her shoulders and back.

Her hands were behind her back (I naturally assumed she was holding candy), and she was smiling at me with perfect teeth.

“Where’re you going?” she asked. I blinked twice in shock then pressed my other hand against the inside of the phone so that Adelaide couldn’t hear us.

“Why’re you home? And where’s daddy?” I asked worriedly. She shrugged.

“He’s out there with the other daddies,” she said in her cute baby-voice, but that didn’t stop the rage bubble from filling up inside my chest at the thought of Jax not keeping track of his own daughter again. “And look – I found this chipmunk in the road! His name is Nutty,” she added as though that would make up for her running off.

She finally brought her hands out from behind her, and in her right palm resided a tiny, a tiny, dead chipmunk that was completely flattened and bloody – some of its organs were still connected to the body... only they

were on the outside. That certainly WASN’T candy. She was exactly that outdoor cat who loved showing its owners the dead bird it just killed as though it were a triumph. I gasped and dropped the telephone onto the kitchen counter behind me.

“FINN!” I cried, “I can’t believe you brought that thing in here, that’s nasty!” I grabbed her by the left wrist and yanked her towards the counter.

“THAT’S MINE!” Finn screamed and promptly began to cry. I ignored her, placed my hands under her armpits, and lifted her onto the kitchen counter. She annoyingly sobbed as I yanked her hands underneath the faucet and turned the water on. I grabbed the soap dispenser, poured a massive amount of lavender-scented goo onto her bloody hands, and cleaned them with a fury.

She stumbled after me as I grabbed the bloody chipmunk, shuddered at the crunchy sound of broken bones grinding together, and threw it into the trashcan under the sink.

“The bones are broken anyways, it won’t be any use to you,” I said. “I-**I’ll GLUE-UE THEM LATER!**” Finn screeched and proceeded to slam her heels of her sneakers against the white cabinet doors under the counter. I leaned against her legs with my torso to make her stop. Meanwhile, her traumatized pet rat scurried out of the kitchen as fast as it could move after all of the commotion.

“Look, you’ve gotta stop bringing home road-kill, honey, it’s unsanitary and disgusting,” I growled, really trying not to lose my shit with this screwed-up kid. “I thought you-you didn’t wa-ant me to take alive animals!” she cried. “That too,” I muttered, wondering

where I went wrong in raising her. As I dried off her hands, I suddenly remembered the phone that was sitting on the counter. My face turned red as I realized that Adelaide must’ve heard everything.

I left my daughter to her screaming, and picked the phone back up.

“HELLO? Cherisa?”

“I’m here, I’m here. Sorry. My daughter just walked through the door,” I said frantically, running a wet hand through my messy dirty blonde hair.

“So I heard. I’m picking you both up in five, and Cher...bring your camera,” But right as I was about to protest my daughter joining us – Adelaide hung up the phone.

I huffed with frustration and then furiously pressed the numbers to Jax’s cell phone. It rung once and went straight to voicemail –

like it always did whenever he hit Ignore Call. I slammed the home phone onto the counter, which finally got my daughter to stop crying.

She turned to me with a red, puffy face – her face paint was running down her cheeks with the tears, making her look like a melting clown.

“Where’re we going?” she asked again. I raised my eyebrows and tried to ignore the chill that crept down my spine at the complete 180 she just pulled.

“Out,” I spat. She hiccupped and jumped off of the counter.

“Can I bring Nutty along too?”





# Five

It was 7:45 pm when Fletcher and Adelaide picked us up. Their black car smelt like moldy cheese and beer, and I'd never smelt anything worse in my life. But Finn didn't seem to mind the smell one bit – she literally plopped into the nacho cheese-smelling backseat, took her sneakers off, sat on her feet, and stared out the window. She waved at a few of her school friends who were still out trick-or-treating as we passed by them, and all three Disney princesses gave an awkward wave back. Then Belle leaned into Sleeping Beauty and began to whisper while Snow White took an apple out of her candy bag and looked at it with disgust.

For the first two minutes of the ride, I had to manually roll down the back seat window and stick my head outside of this piece-of-shit car Fletcher named: “Noah The Ford Fiesta.”

“Jesus, dude, it’s not *THAT* bad,” Adelaide said about the smell from the passenger seat while lighting and smoking a joint. And as soon as that skunk-like smell mixed in with the rest of the puke-worthy stench, I wanted to die. Finn was still surprisingly silent, ignoring what was happening around her, and just staring out the window while picking at dead skin around her fingernails.

“I wonder where that skunk is,” she suddenly said to herself and then started bouncing her butt on her feet, yelling: “PINS AND NEEDLES, PINS AND NEEDLES, PINS AND-“ I slapped my left hand across her mouth to make her stop chanting what she

always starts to chant whenever she sits on her feet for too long. I had to pinch her left arm with my other hand to make her stop. And after she fully silenced herself, I returned my attention to Adelaide.

My eyebrows furrowed as I realized that she had aged quite a bit since the last time I saw her two years ago. Her nose had become pointer, her hair had become brittle and spidery – its color had faded to orange. It was pulled up into a messy bun and her wrinkly face was caked with makeup, which gave her the appearance of a 50 year old instead of a woman in her early 30’s.

Then I turned to look at Fletcher – who I’d never met before. He looked about the same as Adelaide did, except he had a really bad bleach-blonde dye job on his shoulder-length greasy hair and wickedly horrible

teeth: some were crooked, missing, and they were all tinted yellow or black. I took him for the typical surfer/skateboarding narcissist douche-nozzle who would walk up to a girl and go straight from: “Hey, what’s your name?” to: “Wanna have a good time, baby?”

Now, some girls may be into that sort of thing (\*AHEM\* Adelaide), but I saw right through the bullshit. He probably pretended like he was still 14 (instead of pushing 35), drank like a fish (as if he still had the tolerance for it), and had sex with cougars (which Adelaide appeared to be).

“No, it’s pretty bad,” I finally replied as the wind pulled strands of blonde hair out of my messy bun and flung them in front of my face. I pulled them behind my ears as I stared back out the window at a much prettier scene.

“So, you didn’t want to dress up or anything?” she asked with a smoking joint between her fingers. I then looked at what she was wearing out of habit – a short, tight black and red dress with a red waist-strap covering her stomach that sported white cross on the front. The hem of the dress barely covered her ass, and the low, v-neck barely covered her Botox-infused boobs. The dress had very short sleeves, and she was wearing black latex gloves and black fishnet stockings. I also realized that she was wearing a little black and red hat in front of her hair bun that also sported a white cross on the front.

Naughty Nurse. I thought as I shook my head and lifted my Canon t5i camera out of my lap to snap some pictures of the neighborhood we were driving through. I also kept

glancing at my child to make sure she wasn't looking at the rolled-up weed cig that Laide was holding openly for everyone to see.

"We're going to a haunted house, not a party," I replied flatly. "And aren't you cold in that?" Adelaide ignored me, sighed, and turned to Fletcher. She placed a hand on his broad shoulders, her obviously fake acrylic fingernails practically poking through the latex. She used one of them to lightly scratch Fletcher's neck as he kept his eyes on the road. His skin puckered when she lightly scratched it – almost like she was poking Saran wrap. Speaking of which, there was a box of it sitting in the backseat between Finn and I.

"And why is there Saran wrap back here?" I asked again. Fletcher glanced at the box and then quickly turned back around.

"Oh, we went to Kroger earlier – Laidey

wanted to get a box of it to wrap up some of the cookies we just bought," he explained. Meanwhile, I was still mesmerized by the color of his skin. The dark gold leather-like consistency reminded me an old briefcase Jax kept in our closet, one he kept his gym clothes in.

I wonder if Fletcher actually felt like leather... or Saran wrap, for that matter.

"Cher used to dress up for Halloween ALL the time when we were in college, and she always had the coolest decorations. The pictures she took of our old rooms were gorgeous – why did you give up being a photographer anyway?" she explained and then turned back to me.

I bit my tongue to keep myself from saying: 'I've probably mentioned the fact that I got married and had a kid, I don't know, maybe I thousand times.' Finn suddenly gasped

and pointed at the window. Saved by the bell.

"There's a cat out there, mommy, a black kitty! Can we stop and keep him?" she asked energetically, suddenly turning to me and yanking on my fleece jacket sleeve. I glanced out of the window as we zoomed past the tiniest cat I've ever seen, you could barely see it, and it was limping on the side of the road. My heart hurt for it and I honestly wanted nothing more than to take the poor thing home and take care of it, but I removed Finn's hands from my coat and shook my head.

"No, Finn, you have enough animals as it is," I said.

"I only have two cats, though!" she cried. My eyes widened at this child's stupidity and I nodded slowly at the little brown-haired psychopath. Finn pouted and stared back out the window while I huffed. I then caught Adelaide

and Fletcher giving each other sideways glances. I guess they finally understood why I gave up photography. A heavy silence followed, and I checked my iPhone again – still no calls or texts from my lovely husband. What a helping hand. He was probably still playing on his phone and ignoring all of his texts and calls.

"Soooo, Miss Bella/Renesmee... do you like, wanna be a vet when you grow up or something?" Adelaide asked after taking a huge inhalation of marijuana. I cringed at the accusation that Finn was dressed like one of the Twilight vampires, and frowned because Laide was never really that great with children, even when she tried to be. She was always too blunt and she treated everyone like they were adults, no matter the age. Even Finn looked uncomfortable actually replying to her. She squirmed in her seat and then she shook

her head – more than likely thinking: ‘I’m NOT Renesmee OR Bella. I’m DRACULA.’

“No, I wanna do the jewelry business,” she replied with a nod while still having her face practically plastered to the window. She was now staring at a spider that was crawling up the outside of her window, her finger following it on the other side of the glass. I grinned at Adelaide’s confused expression in response.

“Jewelry? Like, making and selling it?” she asked, because obviously my child didn’t portray that of a jeweler. Fletcher looked very bored with the conversation – he gave a big sigh, followed by a wet cough while driving onto the entrance ramp to MA-128 North.

He then proceeded to hock up a loogie and spit it out through his window. Instead of it hitting the pavement, it splattered across my spit it out through his window. Instead of it

hitting the pavement, it splattered across my back window since we were now driving 70 miles per hour.

I scrunched up my nose at the gooey yellow substance then snapped a picture of it to get my mind off of the fact that we were now 15 minutes away from Danvers, where the Old Watson House resided.

I still got the chills as Finn nodded and made full eye contact with Adelaide.

“Dead animal bone jewelry,” Finn said with an innocent smile. I pressed my lips together to keep from laughing as Adelaide sported an: ‘Oh shit, Cher wasn’t kidding about Finn and her animals,’ look on her face. I loved it so much that I picked up my camera and snapped a picture of it with the flash on. Adelaide yelped and blinked several times while I stared at the digital picture – the slack

jaw, the bug eyes, the raised Crayola eyebrows, and the very defined forehead lines.

Classic. I wanted to blow it up, frame it, and keep it forever.

“You’re so much like your mother, dude,” Adelaide said.

“No – mommy doesn’t like me,” Finn responded as-a-matter-of-factly, and then started picking at a loose tooth. I felt my stomach drop and my pupils dilate as I heard my six-year-old accuse me of not liking her in front of two strangers. My face turned bright red with embarrassment and I felt the urge to throw her out of the car.

However, I settled for jabbing her in the side with my elbow and mouthing ‘Stop picking at your tooth.’

Finn inched away from me and glued her face back to the window – clearly getting the

message that she should stop talking. Adelaide just laughed maniacally, hitting Fletcher in the arm while she did so. Fletcher laughed too, the two of them clearly very high at this point. I glared at them again in response. I honestly didn’t mind Finn thinking that I disliked her, but I didn’t want my daughter to know who I used to be under any circumstances – that would just encourage her to continue on this weird path she seemed to be taking.

Why couldn’t she have been more like Jax – bland and boring? She already had the idiot part down, why not just go big or go home? At this point, the sun had almost gone down completely and I was beginning to feel nauseous, and not just from this conversation.

The nauseous feeling was accompanied by an unusually dry mouth and sweating palms. And for some reason, I knew what Fletcher was about to say before he even said it:

“There it is,” he pointed towards Adelaide’s window, “We’re here.”

We veered to the right, off of the highway, and began to roll on dusty rocks instead of asphalt. The entire car fell dead silent as everyone stared out of the windshield at this house that looked like an enormous black hole from far away. The entire car fell dead silent as everyone stared out of the windshield at this house that looked like an enormous black hole from far away. And the closer we got, the more it felt like it had some sort of gravitational pull – like Fletcher wasn’t even driving the car anymore, the house was just yanking us into the darkness. The air was so thick that I could have gashed it with a knife, and my stomach churned with the idea of it filling up my lungs.

“What’s the story on this house, Cher?” Adelaide asked.

She knew my buried-deep taste in weird stuff and story-telling a little too well...

To Be Continued...

