

# **What Now, Emma Lenford?**

## **Chapter 7: Road Trip**

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## **Dedication**

To all the Emma Lenfords out there; Gracie Hart would be proud.

## Road Trip

Well, watching Briana Bodenhigger didn't go quite exactly as planned.

But, even if I'm not her mother's favorite... Bri *did* claim me to be her new favorite babysitter, so I must have done something right.

Either way, though, the sudden Wisconsin blizzard raged on through the night and, miraculously, god must have chosen to answer the prayers of every young person in every square mile of Talket County the very next Monday morning.

*Because school had been cancelled for the day.*

And, yes, I'll admit I slapped my mattress and screeched a tad too loudly in joy when I checked my messages about forty seconds after my alarm went off and stumbled upon the glorious text message from the local weather channel: All schools in the Talket County School System are closed for the entirety of Monday the 27th of March, 2017, causing my father to, once again, burst into my room with his favorite baseball bat once he had heard my screams.

I had to calm him down, though; he's been a little on-edge since he found out about how the whole school thing with Grayson, a boy who he assumed was safe enough for me to hang around with every other weekend, but sort of kind of wasn't who *either* of us thought he was, had gone down. Which, actually, is also why I decided to not inform him of any of the other incidents that have chosen to befall me the past few weeks beside that one; I'm kind of afraid he'll physically go into cardiac arrest.

Well, except for the thing with the crazy lady that kept calling me *Erica*... because he actually had to pick Stella and me up from the police station that afternoon. And he didn't come back from that one very easily, either.

Anyway, after I realized that I had the whole day to myself with absolutely nothing in the world to care about... I decided it was a good time to watch some good ol' fashioned TV marathons of classic sitcoms and eat nothing but blue frosting graham cracker sandwiches all the live long day.

And that's just what I did.

Until my dad left for an unexpected night shift at his place of business at 7 p.m. and I decided that, after hours upon hours of lounging on the sofa in my llama pajamas and... no underwear... I really needed a shower.

And that's where this particular story begins.

With me, naked, under the steaming hot water of the house's only shower head, belting out the classic theme song of *That 70s Show*.

"*Hanging out!*" I shouted, closing my eyes and wetting my medium brown hair under the pelting water drops. "*Down the street!*"

I spun around and stepped back so the water wasn't splashing my eyelids as I opened them.

"*The same old thing!*" I yelled, right before I purposely threw a handful of water over my face. "*We did last week!*"

I turned back to the front of the shower, now allowing the steam to hit my back yet again.

"*And not a thing to do...*" I paused to snatch up my super-sized white conditioner bottle from the shelf ahead, and then yanked it inward, making sure it was perfectly

positioned under my chin as I held the index finger of my free hand up to my ear, all for that special added effect. "*But talk to you!*"

I slapped the side of the bottle and spun around once more.

"We're all alright!" I went on, waving the conditioner in and out of the water as I did so. "We're all alright!"

I grabbed the bottle with both hands and held it up to my chin, again.

"*Da-da-da-da-da-da!*" I sang, and then threw my head back to finish. "Hello Wisconsin!"

I brought my head back to center and chuckled a tad as I turned around and set my conditioner bottle down.

And then I swore I heard some sort of light tapping sound come from the hallway outside.

I immediately froze and attempted to listen for more... but no other noise came.

Still, though, I pulled the shower curtain back the slightest bit, and then poked my eyes out from behind it to scan the bathroom as well as what I could see of the dim hall outside (since I was home alone, after all, and *had* figured it was pretty safe to leave the door open). However, I saw nothing, so I returned to my hygienic duties.

Right when I leaned my back against the fall of roaring water, though, I heard another soft tap from outside.

"Okay, really," I muttered out, now reaching for the edge of the curtain once more. I paused before opening it again, though, because I heard another strange sound follow the last two.

"*Emma...*" some low, moaning-sort-of voice mumbled out from a bit far away.

I froze up, my hand still on the plastic curtain.

"*Gr—Grandma?*" I grumbled out, only now beginning to turn toward where my hand rested.

And, FYI, my grandmother passed away ten years ago.

"*Emma...*" the voice repeated, though closer this time.

I heard no footsteps accompany this voice, though I suppose the sound of the rushing water from the shower head beside me could have drowned them out, but I assumed there were none and that the voice had to be coming from some odd, unknown force.

I paused another moment with my hand still stuck to the curtain, and I couldn't bring myself to pull it back to peer outside again.

But, I guess I didn't have to, because, about five seconds later, it whipped completely back and open in front of me.

I screamed and turned to snatch up my jumbo conditioner bottle once more in such a hurry that I then slipped on the slick shower floor and fell right on my frontside, bringing down all my soap bottles and cans from the same shelf with me.

"*Emma...*" the voice said yet again, now much, *much* closer to me.

I snapped my head up to the side of the shower curtain and saw none other than Stella Anderson standing in the opening set before me.

"*Stella!*" I screeched out.

"Emma, is that you?" she questioned, staring at my bare backside.

"Yes, Stella!" I shouted. "What the hell are you doing!"

"Yay!" she screeched, throwing her hands out to her sides. "I *found* you!"

She then spun herself around, though she jabbed her side into the corner of the bathroom counter nearby before she could manage the whole three-sixty.

"Ow!" she yelled, afterward stumbling back and grabbing at her abdomen before she plopped down to the ground on her bottom.

"Ow!" she repeated in the moment that her butt slapped the bathroom tile, and then closed her eyes tightly and leaned forward until her forehead touched the floor between her loose Victoria's Secret jogger-covered legs.

I took her moment of wincing to jump up and snatch up the nearest towel to wrap around myself. As soon as I covered myself and stepped out of the shower, though, her head popped right back up.

"Oh..." she began, her eyes suddenly widening up at me. "*M... G!*"

She shot back up to her feet and waddled her UGG-protected toes up to me, a mere two inches or so away.

"Emma..." she whispered, and then looked me over as she, oddly enough, stroked a hand over the side of my dirty old blue towel. "I love this new dress..." She whipped her eyes back up to mine. "Where did you even *get* it?"

I held in a chuckle.

"Stella," I began back. "You're... *kidding*, right?"

She kept her eyes locked onto mine.

"No," she answered.

I glanced down at where her hand still patted my side, and then pushed it away.

"Stella, I think—"

"Oh my god," she cut me off. "Emma, is *that* a beach house!"

I gazed back up at her right as she jumped past my side, and then turned to see her try to jump over the edge of the shower/tub behind me, trip, and then face-plant into the bottom, her legs rolling over her head as the water continued to rain down on top of her.

"Oh, boy," I muttered, and then stepped over to the edge to shut the shower water off.

"*The tide is high!*" she yelled out, crawling herself back up to her knees in the bottom of the tub. She threw her head back and looked up at me before continuing. "*But I'm holdin' on!*"

She then collapsed into a fit of giggles as I reached out to grab her arm and yank her out of the tub.

"I'm gonna be Emma's *number one!*" she went on to just *hilariously* sing as she stumbled onto the floor.

I had to pull her back from another fall before she stood back up, somewhat steadily, in front of me, still heartily laughing and all.

"Stella," I began, knotting the top of my towel around my chest before I grabbed her shoulders and forced her to face me. Once she ceased her laughter, then, I pierced my eyes into hers and went on. "*You're drunk.*"

She raised her eyebrows and dropped her jaw a bit.

"Wh—What?" she questioned.

"Or high," I continued. "I'm not exactly sure which because I'm not a drug expert or psychoanalyst or anything, but... if I had to put my money on it... I'd say you mistook your mom's special cocktail stash for the green tea K-cups in the family coffee maker."

"But, Emma," Stella started, shaking her head. "I don't even *like* coffee."

"Yeah, well," I said, before I trailed off for a moment. "Here, come with me."

I turned to the door and made my way out to the hall.

"Oo," she began, right before chasing after me. "Are we gonna watch *Mrs. Doubtfire*?"

I didn't even reply or look back; I just forged on to my room at the end of the corridor.

"Or *Jurassic Park*?" she asked, her pounding footsteps following close behind me.

"Or maybe *Gho*—"

And then she slid down and tumbled her face onto the hardwood floor, again, right next to my feet. I paused in my doorway to look down at the back of her blonde-haired head for a second, and then just went on inside.

"Why do I keep doing that?" her voice muffled out, right before she pulled herself back up. "I don't even *like* falling!"

I stopped by the edge of my mint green-sheeted bed and turned back to her, raising my brows.

"Oo, Emma," Stella went on, now preoccupied with intriguingly scanning the small cramped area around us that was my bedroom. "Is this your *brother's* room?"

I crossed my arms over the loosening towel at my chest and turned to follow her as she stepped over to my sloppy white wooden dresser, clothes hanging out of each inch of its drawers.

"I don't *have* a brother," I grumbled behind her back. "Or a sister, actually, at least... I don't think so. Just me and my lonesome old father... and a dead dog buried in the backyard. A few neighborhood rats, too, I guess... and the termites in the walls."

Stella suddenly spun around and held a small, rubberized lizard keychain out between us, forcing me to step back a tad.

She stared at me for a few moments, and then squeezed the mini toy's sides, making a long red rubber tongue roll out of its mouth and tap me on my nose.

I moved my eyes from her to the keychain.

And then she keeled over in a fit of laughs.

"Oh my god!" she shouted, physically collapsing to her knees. "*Emmet*, you're so funny!"

She proceeded to roll over to her back and toss the toy across the room, hitting and knocking over a glass vase on my bedside stand.

"Ugh, Stella," I grouched as I rushed over to save it from rolling onto the floor.

I heard her gasp as I set it back in place.

"Oh... *M... G...*" she began, now scampering up to my side. "You have a *hamster*!"

She reached out to snatch up the broken black alarm clock box that sat beside the empty vase.

"He's so cute..." she commented.

However, before she could completely pick it up, I seized it right back and slammed it back down.

"Okay, Stella," I started, grabbing her upper arm and swinging her around to sit on the bed's edge behind me. "*Why* are you here?"

I took a step back and tightened the towel around my body.

She paused for a moment, sighed, and then glanced up at me as she brought her legs up to cross underneath herself.

"There's this, like, *guy*... waiting for me, I guess," she stated.

"A *guy*?" I questioned, leaning inward to her. "What *guy*?"

"Coo-wl yer radishes, Emma," Stella half-slurred out. "I'm gettin' to it..."

I watched as she rocked onto her back, and then pulled herself up once again.

"Emma, listen..." she went on, rolling her eyes back and forth as she spoke.

"*He's gonna make me...*" She stopped to throw her hands out to her sides, her fingers outspread. "*A supermodel!*"

She closed her eyes and forced a weak grin; I paused for a moment and studied her slowly.

"Really..." I began. "Are you..." I tilted my head to one side. "*Sure* about... *that*?"

Stella shot her eyes opened and forcibly nodded.

"Uh, *yeah*, Emma," she huffed. "I'm gonna get, like... head and ass shots and everything." She rubbed her one eye, smearing eyeliner and mascara down her cheek at the same time. "I'm very professional."

"Oh, *yeah*?" I asked, leaning on my left hip. "And do you get a refund, too, if those ass shots don't exactly work out for you? I mean, I know your dad's got money in the bank and all, but..."

"Whoa, *whhh*-oa there," Stella butted in, throwing her head back on her neck and her hands up in 'stop' gestures. "Emma..." She glanced at me once more, her hands frozen in place. "I am fr-eeeeee-aking Stell-*uhhhhh* An-drew-son..." She transitioned to aiming her pointer fingers at her lap. "And if you don't think this here lil' tuchus can break a rat's back, then..." She trailed off for a long moment, staring blankly at the wall behind me. After a good amount of glaring at her obviously distracted and disoriented expression, I decided to open my mouth to speak, myself, but, just then, she turned back to me and finished what she had started. "You cl-*ea*aaaaaa-rly aren't my best friend, Emma."

I nodded with my mouth still half-opened.

"Okay, a few things there, actually..." I began, shifting in place a bit. "One, your name is Stella *Anderson*, not *Andrewson*... second, I don't know what the hell that analogy is supposed to prove for your 'little tuchus'... and third... I think there's actually quite a few things that support the belief that I am not, in fact, your BFF." I paused. "So, um—"

Stella shot out a gasp and jumped up to a stand from the bed's edge, though she almost immediately lost her balance and tripped to her right, tumbling down to the floor below... yet again.

"Oops," she giggled out. "I did it again!"

I returned my arms to a cross and looked from her to the wall across the room with a slight eye roll.

"Hey, Emma," she continued to chuckle, now pulling herself to her knees by my feet. "'Member that?" She stopped to force a half-cough, half-laugh for a moment. "That was so-oooo fun!"

I raised my eyebrows as she stumbled up to her feet.

"Yeah, I guess," I replied. "If you think being the kidnapped subjects of a mentally unstable ninety-year-old woman for one dreary afternoon is a holler and a half, then

okay... but I don't think that's really much my speed, exactly, so no need to hoot and holler at me."

She continued to laugh.

"Oh, I love you, Emm-ie..." she stated, and then turned to plop face-down on top on the bed once more, her whole body outspread across it this time.

"Oh, and so..." she went on, rolling over to crane her neck toward me. "You can thank me now, please."

I glared at her.

"For what?" I questioned.

"Because," she began, right before she threw one arm up over her head. "I got *you* a modeling package, too!"

I narrowed my brows.

"Um..." I muttered. "I'm sorry; *what?*"

"I mean," she continued, and then pulled herself back up to her knees atop the bed sheets. "I know you don't exactly have the *nicest* fashion sense..." She held one hand out, palm-up. "Or the *greatest* ass features, like me..." She flipped over her other hand in a similar manner. "Or the best..." She trailed off in, I guess, deep thought like she had once before, before going on. "*Anything...*" She came down from her knees to sit cross-legged yet again. "But, Emma, you have what the profession calls a certain... *okay-ish* hairstyle and... *decent* nose..." She paused and stared me down for a second. "Well, after some minor plastic work, that is... and, honestly, some cheek fillers wouldn't hurt, either, or—"

I stopped her right there.

"Stella," I snapped, moving my hands into halt gestures. "You can stop now, okay, because..."

I trailed off as Stella leaned back a bit.

"But," she started, quietly. "I was talking about *butt* cheek... fillers..."

I rolled my eyes, again, and twisted away from her for a break of a moment.

"Okay, Stella, listen..." I began, calmly enough, before I glanced back toward her.

"You can *not* go getting any..." I paused to hold one hand of air quotes up to her. "'Modeling packages' from just any random guy you meet on the street... I mean, it was just this random guy telling you about all this junk, right? And... how did you meet him, exactly, anyhow?"

Stella flipped her hair over her face, and then blew a few of her long blonde strands up into suspension over her nose for a second, and then giggled as she fell back on her back, and then brushed them out of the way as she sat back up with a completely emotionless face.

"Okay, *Emma*, listen," she began back, dead-panned. "He's not just *some random guy*... I met him at the mall earlier this afternoon, and he's actually really cool, okay?" She nodded and looked away. "Yeah."

"But," I replied. "Wasn't the mall kind of, uh, *closed* today? With the blizzard and everything? And, actually, even if it weren't... why would you want to drive all the way there and back through all the snow and icy roads?"

"Emma," Stella countered, glaring back at me with an index finger upheld. "I said *listen*..." She stopped for an excessively long moment to clear her throat about seven and a half times. "There's never a bad time to visit the Luis Vuitton store."



I stopped her, again.

"There's no Luis Vuitton shop for at least 300 miles from this town," I said.

"Emma!" she screeched. "I said *listen!*"

I threw one hand up in defense and raised my eyebrows, then allowed her to continue with her story.

"Now, I ran into him in the parking lot... I think..." She trailed off for a moment. "I don't actually remember that part, I guess, but I *do* remember him giving me these, like, special little Pez candies! He said he makes them himself because they're hard to find or something, I guess, but, like, they're always at the check-out lines in Walmart, so... maybe he just goes to Target or something... Anyway, he gave me a few, and they were *rea-l-l-l-l-y, rrrrrr-ea-l-l-l-l-l-l-l-l-l-l-y, rrrrrrrrrrrr-eeeeeee-aaaaa-l-l-l-l-l-yyyyyyyyyyy g-oooooooooooo-d!*"

I widened my eyes at her sudden enthusiasm.

"They, uh, *were*... were they?" I mumbled out.

Stella stared at me for an uncomfortably long moment.

"They, uh, *yeah!*" she mocked me. "Damn, Emma, haven't you ever had a Pez before? You know... the little things that look like pills but come out of a Mickey Mouse dispenser? Only..." She stopped for a second. "These just came out of a little sandwich baggie..." Her eyes lit up once more. "That's probably why they're so good!"

"Oh, no..." I muttered.

She giggled loudly and threw her head back for a long period of time before returning her eyes to me to go on.

"I wanted more of them, but he said you can only have so many at a time or you'll get, like, high blood sugar or something. Or just *high*." She paused, and then laughed, again. "I'm just kidding!"

"I'm sure you are..." I whispered, and then stepped up to her side of the bed. "Here, Stella, why don't you just... lay down for a bit..."

I reached my hands out to touch her shoulders.

"But, Emma," she rejected, pushing me away already. "He's waiting for us... outside!"

I stepped back and paused.

"He... He's outside... *here?*" I interrogated.

"Well," Stella rolled her eyes. "*Duh.*"

"You brought him *here?*" I reiterated.

Stella nodded.

"Oh, great," I mumbled, and then spun around.

"How else are we both gonna become supermodels, Emma, huh!" Stella shouted at my backside.

I rushed forward to my dresser ahead and yanked the top drawer of it open.

"Shut up, Stella!" I yelled back.

I proceeded to rip a plain black bra and a pair of devil red undies that read 'can't touch this' on the back out, then slammed the drawer shut once more. Though, before I could proceed to the next one, Stella screamed at me yet again.

"Emma!"

I threw the garments to the floor, grabbed the top of my towel, and whipped myself around.

"*What!*" I half-screamed, half-grumbled.

Stella leapt from the bed and pointed at my head.

"There's a *spider* in your hair!" she screamed.

Instinctively, I let out a frightful yelp in reply and threw my hands up to grab at the damp wad of dark hair atop my scalp, dropping my dirty towel in the process, though I didn't care much about it right away and continued to rustle through my brown locks as violently as I could.

"Get it out!" I screamed.

Just then, however, Stella let out a rumbling chuckle, rushed forward, slapped her hand at my bare bottom, and then turned to sprint out to the hallway.

"Got'cha!" she shouted as she left the room.

I threw my head back up to center.

"Ugh!" I roared at her. "Stella!"

I turned my naked figure to watch her disappear down the hall to some other part of the house, the only trace of her left behind being her ridiculously annoying giggles forever etched in my ear drums.

After that, though, I turned and knelt down to snatch up my under garments once more, then began to put them on over my burning red skin.

"Emma!" I heard Stella shout from across the house. "I think he wants to come in now!"

I finished slipping both clothing pieces on, and then shot my head back to the hall.

"Do *not* let him in!" I shouted back.

I fell quiet to listen for her response, and then cursed to myself when I heard her stupid laugh once again.

"Damn it," I muttered, now rushing out of my room and into the corridor to the living area. "*Stella!*"

I ran through the den and the dining room to get to the front door area, continuing to shout at her the entire time.

"Don't let that creep in, Stella, or I swear to god!"

And then, once I reached the front room, I slid to a stop to witness Stella as she shut the door behind a tall skinny man with a Chicago Cubs cap and dark olive skin.

I froze as he turned to see me, fresh from the shower in my bra and panties.

"Oh, is this your friend, Miss Anderson?" he asked politely with a nod toward me.

"Oh, Emma!" Stella screeched, spreading her purple sweater-ed arms out as she ran over to me.

"This is her!" she giggled out as she wrapped me, sort of thankfully, into a close, tight hug.

"Why, hello, *Miss...*" he began, pausing and leaning forward afterward, probably expecting me to finish for him or something.

"Emma!" Stella yelled back to him, releasing me from her grip and stepping to my right side.

The man leaned back and slid his hands into his puffy black coat pockets.

"Oh, *Emma*," he smiled, eerily. "Nice to meet you."

I immediately grabbed Stella's arm and yanked her back over to me, then tossed her in front of myself and gave her a tight squeeze of a hug from behind with my arms

around her shoulders; I could maybe mention that she continued to giggle the whole time.

"Yup," I started, throwing my head over one shoulder as I used her to shield my partially bare body. "Emma and Stella... it has a nice ring to it, kind of; it would make a good book or something someday." I then let out a forced, heavy chuckle of my own. "But, um, anyway... we really need to, uh—"

And, before I could even finish, the man stepped forward and leaned inward yet again.

"Would you like some candy, Emma?" he asked.

I raised my eyebrows, unconsciously, then shook my head.

"No, thank you, actually, I..." I responded. "I'm not *seven years old*, and I kind of... need to watch my calories."

He leaned back and smiled, again.

"Oh, I can tell *that*," he stated.

I don't think my eyebrows could have raised any higher.

"Um," I picked back up. "As I was saying, though, Stella and I need to... go grab our makeup and stuff."

Stella let out a small gasp and butted in.

"Can we go to Sephora instead?" she asked, not once looking back at me.

I jerked my hands tighter around her neck area.

"No, Stella," I jumped in to say before the man could speak. "Sephora is closed right now... and so is every other store in the county, actually, so—"

"Actually, I have plenty of makeup for you girls to use at *my* place," he cut me short.

"Oo!" Stella cooed, attempting now to step forward, out of my clutches. I quickly pulled her back in, however, and countered his offer.

"*Actually*," I began. "I have really sensitive skin, and I need to use my special foundation, so I should probably go get that."

Stella tried to step away from me, again.

"Well," she added on, now trying to brush my hands away from her shoulders. "I'll wait for you out in the car, then, Emma."

I grabbed at her collar bone once more and kept her from walking away.

"But, Stella," I spat out. "You hid it from me as a joke, remember?" I forged another small laugh and began to spin her around to face me for once. "Oh, yeah, it's so funny, but, uh... I *don't* know where you *put* it, *Stella*."

Stella stood, forced to stare at me as I held her shoulders still, and then scrunched up her face again.

"Oh my *god*!" she shouted, and then slapped my hands completely away. "I didn't take *any* of your shit, Emma!" She took a step back, shook her head, and then abruptly dropped her voice and began to sniffle. "Why would you even say something like that?"

I paused for a moment and watched as she brushed a sudden but genuine tear away from underneath one eye.

"Because... you..." I started to reply while she sniffed some more. "You didn't take it, exactly, you just... hid it... in my room somewhere, I think, and I'm sorry if I was mistaken, but I need to find it either way, so..." I stopped and reached out to gently grab at one of her dangling wrists. "If you could... just... come with me..."

"No!" she shrieked, throwing my hand back at me. "You don't trust me, Emma! And you... you..."

Her whines turned into soft cries as she threw her head into her hands.

"Sh," the man piped up from behind, stepping forward to place a hand on her shoulder; he afterward glanced up at me. "I think it's time for Miss Anderson to get some rest..."

He turned toward the door and spun her around.

"Wait," I blurted out, jumping up to her backside as he began to creak the door open, revealing the very windy, cold darkness to us all. "Stella, wait."

The man stepped outside and dragged her close behind.

"Stella, please," I spat, and then grabbed at the back of her free arm once more.

"Get off!" she yelled in response, brushing my hand away yet again as she stepped out into the lightly snowy night.

I halted at the door's edge as the man continued to pull her down the porch steps toward his shiny black Mercedes. I then watched when he stopped her a few feet by its side and left to open the driver's door.

I glanced down at my attire and bare feet, then grumbled and decided to jump into the cold after her.

"Ugh..." I mumbled, right before my frozen toes trotted up to Stella's side.

I reached out to wrap my arms around her, making sure one hand covered her blubbering mouth before I jerked her into the direction of the door.

"Shut up and just come with me," I whispered to her.

She yanked herself the opposite way and let out a small scream behind my protection.

"Stella, hush!" I muttered out, tugging her back into the right direction.

She groused out against me once more and grabbed at my hand, then attempted to force it away.

But you all know neither it nor I was going anywhere.

"Mm!" she continued to mutter, struggling to push me away.

"Sh!" I countered, now stumbling to the side, forced to look away from where the man still hunched over beside his car, doing god knows what.

And then Stella proceeded to kick my shins.

"Ow," I uttered, backing up a bit, but still keeping my grasp on her.

"Mm!"

"Stella," I went on to whisper as I pulled her back into me. "Just stop and—"

And *then* I felt a scratchy thick cloth flip itself over my neck and painfully pull me backward.

I immediately released Stella and grabbed at what I believe was a ripped, but durable, old wife beater as it choked me into submission.

"Ah!" Stella fully screamed out, now that she was able to, while I gargled and staggered backward with the cloth's grasp.

I felt the fabric of the creepy man's smooth puff coat press up against my backside, and then found my feet tripping on top of the snow as I was dragged a few more feet back. After that, I was forcibly whipped around to see, of course, the Mercedes' dark, open trunk area, before I was lifted from my heels completely and thrown actually *into* it.

The pressure on my throat was released, and I grabbed at the loosened wife beater as I attempted to roll from my stomach to my back atop the itchy car carpet. And then, before I could move in any other way, I witnessed the man return with Stella, silently seized by her waistline, right before she was tossed right on top of me.

"Safe travels," he muttered out.

Stella actually let out a soft giggle as the trunk door was slammed down on top of us. I, however, surrendered to the silence and waited for the sound of the engine being ignited. After that, I blinked through the darkness and pushed Stella off of me.

"See what you did, Stella!" I rumbled, right before the car lurched forward and made me roll and tumble on top of her. "God damn it!"

I peeled my half naked body off of her as she laughed out loud... again.

"W-eeeeeeee!" she enthused as the car bounced violently underneath where we were now forced to lay. "This is so fun!"

"Stella!" I scolded, now trying to blindly flip over to my hands and knees. At least, as well as I possibly could have. "I swear on my estranged mother's grave, I will *rip* your stupid, prissy blonde curls right out of their hair holes and—" I paused, abruptly, while my body was thrown back down to its side from the bumpiness of the road underneath the two of us. "Hire an occultist to curse every one of them before I donate it all to a wig charity!"

Stella let out a sound of 'awe' as I pulled myself onto my stomach once more.

"You'd really do that for me?" she cooed.

"Yeah," I shot back. "In fact, I can do the honors right now."

I threw one hand out to what I thought to be the top of her head and grabbed at a chunk of her hair through the black air surrounding us. I then yanked it inward and forced her to scream out.

"Owie!" she shrieked. "Ow, ow, ow, ow!"

I released her and replaced my hands underneath myself.

"Now give me your sweater or something," I ordered her. "It's too cold in here for beach attire."

"No!" she huffed back, and my eyes had adjusted to the dark enough that I could now see her cross her arms where she lay. "You're *mean*!"

"Yeah, well, when you're cramped in a ten-degree car trunk with, literally, not even the clothes on your back because some girl you don't even *like* dragged a pedophile disguised as a modeling agent to your house in the middle of a Wisconsin snow storm on a school night... you don't exactly feel in the mood to be *nice*," I rambled back to her. "Now, give me your damn sweater!"

Stella fell quiet, and then I heard that tiny snuffle of hers.

"You..." she nearly inaudibly mumbled. "Y—You... said... y—you... don't... l—l—l—like... me..."

I rolled my eyes, though I knew she couldn't see them.

"Stella, this is not the time," I said.

"B—B—B—B—But," she stuttered out. "Y—Y—Y—Y—You s—s—s—s—said..."

I picked up as she trailed off and pulled myself up to my knees, again.

"Please just give me your—"

I stopped, though, when we traveled over another heavy bump and I smashed my head into the ceiling of the trunk door.

"Ugh," I grumbled, and then fell down to my side another time.

I grabbed at the stabbing new wound for a second, then decided to glance back at Stella and continue a bit more kindly.

"Okay, Stella," I started. "I didn't mean that. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said it, okay? I mean... you're really not the *best* friend I've ever had... but, I don't *hate* you and you've never tried to kill anybody, other than me, so you're okay... okay?"

She fell silent for a long moment.

"Okay?" I repeated.

I watched her head turn toward me, and then listened for her response.

"Emma," she began. "I... I don't know where the... the frogs went..."

I narrowed my brows.

"*Frogs?*" I clarified.

I saw her nod her head a bit.

"They wouldn't kiss me," she declared. "They said I had stinky feet... but I can't help it!"

I paused for another lengthy moment in time.

"Um, well," I said. "Can I borrow your sweater, now?"

She looked from me to the ceiling, and then began to wiggle her fuzzy purple top over her head, leaving a black tank top underneath it. She then threw it over my face, and I graciously slipped it on over my head.

"Thank you," I muttered, now shimmying it snugly down to my waist.

"But, I mean, who wouldn't kiss *me*?" Stella questioned aloud.

Just then, the car slammed to a stop, and she rolled on top of me. She, of course, laughed out, and then decided to poke my nose with one finger.

"*Boop!*" she giggled.

When the car reeled forward once more, she rolled away, and I threw my elbows down to keep me from tumbling around, too.

"Okay," I whispered, once we reached a steady drifting speed. "Now, um..." I threw my warming, covered arms down to the left and pushed myself to my stomach.

"Hey, Emma," Stella chuckled out beside me. "I bet you're glad you're not on your period right now."

"Yeah, yeah," I grumbled, coming up to my knees once more.

"Or that you don't have diarrhea," she went on. "Or that you don't have to pee, 'cause these bumps are, like—"

Ironically enough, she was cut off when we drove over another dip in the road. After that, she let out a good laugh for a long second before stopping for another rough spot. Once that one passed, though, she fell quiet, then muttered out.

"Uh oh..." she said.

"What?" I urged, shooting my head toward her.

"I... um..." she began, still staring at the roof over us. "Wait, no, never mind."

"You better not have," I grumbled, and then looked over and around to all of the thin walls around us.

"But, now..." I went on, scooting forward on my knees, my chest sweeping the floor, to touch the interior side of the trunk in front of me. "We have *got* to get out of here."

I proceeded to make a fist and pound against the tough plastic separating us from the outside world.

"One time," Stella said as I knocked on the wall. "I had a brother."

I inched back a bit, and then gazed over at her.

"*Had?*"

"Yeah," she replied, interlocking her hands over her abdomen as she blinked at the black ceiling above us. "But then he ate a pigeon and went to prison." She stopped to giggle. "That's fun to say."

"Uh," I started back. "Is that *true*?"

"Yes," Stella answered, looking over at me. "He was in Scotland. But now he's in Kansas... and I can't remember why..."

I raised an eyebrow, then returned to look at the wall beside me, the one that connected to the rest of the vehicle.

"Oh, yeah, I remember," she picked back up as I banged on the next plastic covering. "He joined a band."

"And why did he have to go to Kansas for that?" I asked, spinning on my knees to get to the next section of siding.

"Because," she started. "It's legal to eat pigeons there."

I paused and glared over at her.

"Isn't it legal to eat pigeons *here*, too?" I asked.

She looked from me to the roof.

"Maybe," she said. "But the band's name is 'Country Blue Ass', too."

I stared at her for a second.

"Okay," I muttered, and then turned back to the paneling in front of me.

"And he always sends fake report cards to dad so he thinks he's still in school, but he dropped out, like, twenty years ago," Stella continued as I pounded the heel of my hand against the hard plastic in front of me. Once I stopped, I spun back toward her and threw my hands down to the roughly carpeted ground.

"*Twenty* years ago?" I questioned as I began to feel around on the floor for... I'm not sure what, but it seemed like the next step.

"No," Stella snapped back. "I said, like, *like*, Emma."

I ceased feeling up the carpet once I concluded it wasn't getting me anywhere.

"Um, okay," I muttered, and then fell back on my knees, hitting my head on the ceiling area in the process. "Ugh..." I leaned forward once more before continuing to speak. "Wait... wasn't this in a movie once?" I glanced over at Stella. "With Halle Berry, remember? I can't remember what it was called." I paused and nodded. "The *Call*."

"Ooo, can we watch it now!" Stella cheered, now, for the first time, flipping over to her stomach, her arms flailing above her head the whole time. "Please, Emma!"

She proceeded to roll over another time, crashing into me and slapping one hand across my face.

"Ow, Stella, stop!" I scolded.

"But, Emma," she went on, now reaching out to pinch both of my cheeks. "*Pah-leeeeeeee-ase!*"

She shifted my head between the left and right while she grabbed at my face.

"Stop it!" I yelled, seizing her wrists.

She then attempted to sit completely up, but promptly rammed the top of her skull into the metal-covered ceiling.

"Owie!" she screeched, immediately releasing me and flopping back down to her back.

And then, I have to admit, I let out a small bit of laughter.

"Oh my god," she muttered. "Emma, I can see *god*!"

I silenced myself and stared at her for a moment.

"You sure?"

"He," she continued. "He's wearing a black hoodie... and he's black... and he has dreadlocks... and he... he's *smoking* something... but I don't think it's a cigarette, but..."

She trailed off, and then I drew a conclusion for her.

"Stella," I said. "That's Snoop Dogg."

She paused for a moment.

"Oh..." she whispered.

And, just then, the car flew over another bump, causing *me* to hit *my* head on the metal similarly to how Stella had.

"Agh," I grumbled, throwing myself partially down to my stomach as I grabbed at the back of my icy wet hair. "Okay..." I breathed the stabbing pain away. "We... *really* need to get out of this death cab."

"Yes," was all Stella mumbled back.

"What did..." I began. "That girl do in the movie... when she was locked in that guy's trunk?"

I looked over at Stella as she looked at me.

"Ate cheesecake," she shot out.

I shook my head.

"No," I said. "She..." I gazed over at the corner by Stella's feet. "Kicked the lights out."

"Awe," she whined out. "I was close..."

"Okay, Stella," I ignored her and went on while I situated in place to face her boots.

"Kick that corner right there by your feet—really hard."

"Ugh," she groaned. "*Why?*"

I snapped my gaze back to her.

"Because I kind of would like to get out of this speeding car before your new *friend* takes us back to his place and makes us into human dolls with buttons for eyeballs, *please*."

Stella rolled her eyes from me to the ceiling yet again.

"You would make a terrible doll, Emma, and I think he knows that," she declared.

"Ugh," I spat out. "Just kick the damn tail lights out!"

Stella jerked at the sound of my very suddenly inclined vocal volume, and then threw her hands down to the floor on either side of herself.

"Okay!" she yelled back, the tinniest hint of annoyance laced in her sounds. "Fine, then..."

She proceeded to raise her head to see the end of the trunk, then tapped the corner, where the tail lights were, ever-so-gently with the tip of her left furry tan UGG. I pursed my lips as she delivered another light pat to the area of plastic, and then another, and then one more before reaching forward and grabbing her arm.



"Stop," I ordered. "Just let me do it."

Stella let out a sound of a choking gasp.

"No, I got it," she spat at me, attempting to wave my hand away and tap the area once more.

"Stella, stop," I repeated. "Give me your shoes."

"No!" she screeched out, turning to slap my forearms with both of her hands.

"Stella!" I shouted, and then hit her hands back.

"Ah!" she shrieked, loud enough that I'm sure all of upper Wisconsin could have heard her, let alone the driver in the car carrying us to our probable deaths.

"Ow!" I replied, wincing at the sound of her voice before grabbing her shoulders and shaking her body in front of me. "Shut up and give me your shoes!"

Stella tried to slap my hands away, and then actually pushed me back a bit.

"No!" she yelled.

"Ugh," I muttered, removing my grasp from her and leaning back on my side.

She then quieted down, as did I, crossed her arms across her chest, and turned to face the wall of the trunk opposite of me. I studied her silent backside for a moment, and then flickered my eyes down to her feet. And then, after that, I lifted myself partially to my hands and knees... and *then* lurched at her feet, arms outstretched and all.

I made no sounds as I grabbed her nearest shoe bottom, but she quickly took note of my ambush, screamed another high-pitched scream, and began to kick and flail her legs about. That didn't matter though, because I managed to slip one of her UGGs away from her before she had the chance to *really* smack my body.

"Ha!" I shouted, now proceeding to bend on my side and slip the cozy warm shoe over my right foot.

"Give that back, Emma!" Stella shouted. "You... You... beaver-headed bitch!"

"Shut up and scootch over," I commanded, right before I turned and aimed my clothed foot at the corner Stella had 'attempted' to break apart.

And *that* was right before she took her exposed, lime green-socked foot to the side of my face, a *lot* more forcibly than she had struck the side of the car earlier.

"Agh!" I yelled, throwing my arms in defense, though a little too late.

"Snitches get stitches, Emma!" Stella shouted as I held my throbbing cheekbone in my hand for a second.

"What?" I questioned, glancing back at to see her still laying on her back, arms crossed, her head held upright to view me.

"You heard me," she said. "So watch your back. You might not wake up tomorrow. Because you won't open your eyes. Because... they'll be sewed shut, snitch."

I stared at her for a moment.

"Whatever," I muttered, and then turned back to my dressed foot and the plastic covering ahead. I focused my attention on it for another moment, re-aimed Stella's boot at the corner of the trunk we were encaged in, and then stomped it just about as hard as I could.

But that didn't do anything.

But Miss Congeniality wouldn't give up so easily.

And neither would Halle Berry.

So, I smashed my foot into it again. And then again. And again. Again. And yet again.

"How's your genius plan working there, snitch?" Stella snickered.

"Shut up," I snapped before striking the corner another time.

And then another. And another. Another. And yet another.

"Why isn't this working!" I yelled out.

"Because Snoop Dogg hates you," Stella replied. "Wait... I mean god."

I looked back at her; she was on her side, her hands under her head, her eyes now closed.

"Well," I began. "I guess I *am* kind of cursed with bad luck for eternity now..." I looked back at my feet. "Ugh."

I flopped my back onto the scratchy floor once more, and then threw my hands over my own closing eyes.

"Why, *Snoop God*..." I mumbled out.

And then we hit a harsh bump, jolting both of our bodies up and down with the ride.

"Ow," Stella whispered, her voice pretty dull and monotone, though I kept my hands over my face and didn't care to look back at her anymore.

And then we rolled over another one.

"Ow," she repeated, her tone remaining the same.

And another.

"Ow," she reiterated.

And then we hit one that was actually so hard and so abrupt that we were both *catapulted* forward, smashing into the frontside of the hard plastic separating us from the rest of the car as it seemed to somehow take one or two spins around, leaving a nauseating heartburn in the back of my throat from my dinner of ramen noodles and potato chips earlier that evening. At the same time, everything around us seemed to slow down while Stella screamed out in terror, up until when I heard a loud crunch sound screech out even louder than her from behind our backs.

And then, just as suddenly as the whole ordeal began, it fell to complete silence and complete stillness, meaning the car engine was no longer *running* and, in turn, no longer *moving*.

"What... the hell... was that..." I groaned, my face, stomach, and thighs physically stuck to the back wall of the trunk.

"Owie..." Stella grumbled in return, *her* body completely smashed up against the back of mine.

I fell quiet, then, and listened intently for any other sounds to start up around us for a long few moments, but there were none.

"Okay, Stella, you can peel yourself off of me, now," I whispered.

"But..." she began to respond. "I... can't..."

"What do you mean you *can't*?" I shot back, unable to move my head even an inch to peer over at her.

"There's no... room," she spoke.

"Oh, yes there is," I countered, and then attempted to push the both of us away from the wall in front of me.

However... I *couldn't*.

"Ow, Emma, stop," Stella spat out.

I paused for a second, and then reached my non-enclosed arm back as far as I could to feel a very oddly misshapen back wall, one that was definitely *much* closer and *much* differently formed than it was about two minutes ago.

"How did *that* happen!" I yelled.

And, just then, an engine of another car directly behind us roared to life, making the both of us jump in place and forcing Stella to scream out, again. I waited for the other car's rumbling sounds to slowly fade away, becoming more and more distant after I heard its tires squeal and screech out.

And then, again, silence.

"And, somehow, this just got worse..." I grumbled. "But..." I stopped and reached my one free arm up to touch the partially crushed trunk ceiling above us. "Maybe..." I pushed against it, hoping it would creak or crack open... but, of course, it didn't. "Ugh..."

I returned my hand to my side, and then lifted my top leg upward as much as I could, and, though it wasn't the one sheltered by Stella's boot, I used it to crash into the cold metal roof a time or two.

But you can probably figure out by now that *that* didn't work, either.

"Oh..." I let out a soft whine of frustration as I dropped my aching foot once more.

"Um, Emma," Stella piped up from behind me, her nose buried into the side of my icy cold neck.

"What?" I snapped.

"I, uh—"

She stopped, suddenly, and then I felt a splash of burning hot, lumpy thick liquid hit the entire back of my scalp as I heard her let out a loud, deep gag.

"*Stella!*" I screamed out, throwing my one hand back to shield the back of my head.

After a quick second or two, though, she finished her vomiting spell, and I wiggled my fingers to flip some of her stomach chunks off of my hand.

"Ew, Emma, don't do that!" Stella shouted.

I froze and bit my bottom lip for a moment.

"I swear to god, Stella..." I grumbled, my teeth gritted as I slapped my moistened hand back down to my hip.

I paused for another long moment.

"It was already bad," I stated, trying to at least relax my voice some small bit. "And then it was worse. And then it was *the* worst. And *now*..." I stopped. "I don't even know *what* to call this. It's worse than the worst of the worst. It's like my life is *A Series of Unfortunate Events* on steroids. Not *just* steroids, either, it's like steroids on cocaine. Oh, and not just that, either, but steroids on cocaine on methamphetamine, and probably even steroids on coke on meth on some other drug that's so bad not even El Chapo himself would ever traffic it to the public." I stopped, again. "Yep, that sounds about like my life right now. So... whenever our kidnapper would like to come and spoon my eyeballs out, I'm ready for him."

I fell to silence.

"God, Emma," Stella eventually piped up. "You don't have to be so dramatic about it..."

I blinked at the black wall my nose was scrunched up against for a second.

"You're right, Stella," I began. "I *don't*... so, so sorry about that."

"Thank you," she accepted my 'apology'.

We then both fell back to silence for... quite a few minutes.

"Ugh," I, after a long time, picked up. "Seriously... when *is* that guy gonna come get us out of here?"

Stella sighed out.

"I don't know," she replied. "But I'm tired. And bored. And hungry..." She paused. "I think I'll call my mom now."

"Wait, *what?*" I shot back. "You... You've had your phone on you... this whole time?"

I felt Stella shift around against my back.

"Uh..." she began to reply. "I mean... I *guess*; I have my lipstick, too, and my debit card—"

"Give me it!" I screeched, reaching my still slimy and half-frozen hand back to blindly grab at her wrists.

"Ow, Emma!" she yelled as I felt and grabbed around at her forearms, then snatched up a small, smooth piece of plastic once I found it.

I whipped my hand in front of my face as well as I could and flickered her light pink iPhone's screen on.

"What are you *doing?*" she groaned.

"Calling the cops," I shot back as I began to dial in an emergency number. "And then I'll hold back my urge to spoon out *your* eyeballs when I get out of this claustrophobic hell."