

I let the salty beach breeze rustle my hair as I gazed up at the clouds, making up stories in my head about the shapes they formed. Ivy and Jill lay beside me atop the van, gossiping about something—again. Luckily, with the crashing of the ocean waves, the calling of the seagulls, and my now automatically-activated tuning out skills, I couldn't hear what they were saying.

*That cloud looks like an oddly-shaped rabbit—the kind you'd find in Wonderland,* I said to myself, letting a small smile escape.

"Don't smirk!" I felt Ivy's bony shoulder shove into mine. I turned my head toward her and wrinkled my eyebrows. "What?" My voice sounded strangely dazed, but it always did when I came out of deep thought.

"Ignore her," Jill laughed, "she's just embarrassed about her crush."

Ivy jerked up into sitting position and glared at Jill. "For the fortieth time, it is *not* a crush!" she denied shrilly.

Jill looked up at Ivy with that mischievous twinkle in her eye. "Then why are you blushing so hard?" she pointed out, smirking and arching an eyebrow.

Ivy flung her hands up to her reddened cheeks as if to cover them up. Jill giggled. I sighed.

*This tired old routine again?* I thought, sitting up with Ivy. "We can get going, if you'd like," I said aloud, fishing the keys out of my pocket.

"Wait, wait," Jill said, sitting up too. "Why do you wanna leave now? We're having a good time!"

"Sitting here in this humid air is a 'good time'?" I replied, climbing slowly down from the roof of the van. "I've got sand in my eyes."

"You were just smiling a minute ago," Ivy pointed out, glad to have a change of subject.

I snorted and rolled my eyes as my sandaled feet hit the sand. "Yeah, well, that was an accident," I responded, walking around to the driver's side. "Come on, if we don't give our parents word that we're okay, they'll have the entire L.A.P.D. after us."

"You are *such* a killjoy, Emma," Jill huffed, but reluctantly leapt down from the van.

"Where are we going next?" Ivy asked, jumping down as well.

"To a hotel, hopefully," I answered, starting up the old van. "We've barely enough cash to buy a fast food dinner, but we've still got your debit card."

“Why don’t we just drive on to Santa Monica?” Ivy whined, refusing to get into the van.

“Because it’s getting late,” I answered exasperatedly, sick of having to be the mature one.

Ivy slumped her shoulders forward. “It’s only five o’clock!” she argued as Jill slid into the front passenger seat. “Haha, shotgun!” Jill laughed, sticking her tongue out at Ivy. I rolled my eyes again. Why had I agreed to do a road trip with a couple of five-year-olds trapped in eighteen-year-old bodies?

“The sun will be setting soon, Ivy,” I reasoned. “It’ll be dark in less than an hour. Now will you get in the van, please?”

“Well, I get to choose the hotel as it’s *my* money,” she bossed, finally clambering into the back seat.

“I honestly don’t care,” I responded, switching the van into gear and making a U-turn off of the beach.

As I drove up towards the busy side street, I took one last glance up at the thick white clouds—now fading in the dying sunlight—and silently wished my Wonderland rabbit farewell.