

THE SECRETS
OF THE
Castle

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THUNDER AND LIGHTNING SERIES · BOOK I

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I dedicate this book to my two sons, Jeremiah and Michael. Their zest for life, adventurous natures, and desire to investigate the world around them inspired the creation of this Thunder and Lightning story and the upcoming sequels. May God bless them and their families with the same joy I find in them.



CONTENTS

1. Driving Disaster	1
2. The Threat	7
3. Strike One	13
4. The Romantische Strasse	19
5. Castle in the Distance	25
6. Thief in the Night	27
7. Missing Map	37
8. Sinister Encounter	41
9. Whistle While You Walk	49
10. No Dogs Allowed	55
11. Secret Passages	59
12. Tunnel Talk	67
13. Hidden Entrance	73
14. Tyranny of Time	79
15. Strike Two	87

16. The Singer's Hall	99
17. The Moonlit Chase	111
18. Strike Three: You're Out	117
19. The Lion's Den	125
20. Way of Escape	135
21. Test of Courage	139
22. Schnell Spelunking	145
23. Battle Engaged.	151
24. The Open Door	161
25. Guard Duty	167
26. Summit Meeting	175
27. Fact is Stranger than Fiction.	179

Chapter 1

DRIVING DISASTER

I fumed inside. As an explorer and adventurer I craved action. But the splatter of raindrops on the windshield followed by moments of thin sunshine warming the steamy road we traveled promised another boring vacation. Bound by a seatbelt for hours on end, I dozed from unwelcome inactivity until I got my wish—sort of.

Mom screamed as our van slid sideways down the four lane road and Dad yelled, “Hang on!” He struggled to gain control of the steering wheel, but the van swung into the passing lane on our side of the German Autobahn. A shrill car horn blasted. I clapped my hands over my ears. A quiver of fear ran through my body when I glanced out the window.

“The guardrail,” I cried out.

“Gabe, quiet,” Mom silenced me.

I strained against my seatbelt and clenched Dad’s headrest with sweaty hands. My eyes felt like they were popping out of my head. *We’re out of control.* I pictured metal shrieking against metal as we impacted the guardrail. I envisioned glass shattering in my face and blood pouring out of my punctured body. *That’s not gonna happen*

to me. I set my jaw and stiffened my arms in a brace position, ready to duck if the windows got smashed. Our van jerked back and forth across the roadway. We sped toward the metal barrier in the highway's center. The scene burned into my mind.

Mom, face pale, pushed her hands against the front dash.

"Hold on, Thunder," my older brother, Alex, shouted. He wedged his dog between captain-style seats. Alex clutched his dog's neck and pushed his knees against Mom's seat.

I dropped one hand's death grip on Dad's headrest and pulled my dog, Lightning, off the floor and held him tightly to my chest.

At the last instant, Dad swerved away from the guardrail. The sudden move slammed my cheek against the window. Sharp pain jarred my senses to full alert. I tasted blood as I saw gray metal rails flash within inches of my eyes before we zigzagged away from the highway center and toward the thirty-foot drop-off on the Autobahn's edge. *We'll be tossed around like rag dolls if we go over the cliff.* I jammed my feet against a wall panel and Dad's seat, teeth locked down tight. Backpacks lying on the rear bench seat smashed against the window behind me then flew over to the other side. I smelled burning rubber and heard the sound of Dad pumping the brakes. My heart jumped into my throat as we rocketed toward the edge of the roadway. *Dad ... don't wreck!* My muscles screamed from the tension.

Horn blaring, a gray Mercedes sliced the air next to my window, splitting the gap between the guardrail and us. I jumped at the sound and lost my grip on Dad's headrest. My gut churned. I bit back the stinging in my throat, gulping intensely to keep my breakfast where it belonged.

Dad jerked the steering wheel left to keep us on the roadway while swerving to avoid cars darting around us. My seatbelt cut hard into my chest, and pulled my body to the right toward Alex and Thunder. A red Porsche followed by a gray-green Volkswagen slipped past us. Muscling the steering wheel, Dad battled our van to a stop on the shoulder of the road.

I zoned out, aching all over. *We made it. I'm alive.* Pulse racing, my mind went in every direction at once. *Safe. Cheek pain. Blood*

taste. When my eyes focused again, I pulled my legs up to my chest, hugged Lightning close, and ran my fingers along my teeth on the left side. They came out a little red. I wiped them on a tissue. Lightning went into a frenzy of licking my cheeks and nose, but I didn't care. Other than my cheek and mouth, everything seemed to work fine as I scrambled out of my seatbelt and stuck my head between the front seats.

Sweat rolling down his cheeks, Dad seemed frozen for a moment. Then he loosened up and looked at Mom. His shoulders pressed into his seat and he let out a big breath of air, slapping the steering wheel.

"Is everyone alright?" Mom asked, twisting around to check. She hugged me, then pushed me back into my seat. She inspected each of us for broken bones and cuts. "Gabe, why are you rubbing your face?"

I explained what had happened. "My cheek's sore. I could have a broken cheek bone." I opened and closed my jaw a couple of times. My fingers were tingling.

"I'm fine," said Alex.

I looked at my fourteen-year-old brother. His face was tight and his lips pinched. Always the rock-solid, unexcitable boy with common sense and steady nerves, he was completely my opposite. He stroked Thunder, whom he had freed from the earlier death grip around his neck. Thunder now sat back on his haunches and watched what was happening.

Mom untangled herself from her seatbelt and moved through the gap between the front captain chairs to kneel beside us. She put her hand on my chest and bent my head sideways to look at my cheek. I showed her the blood on the tissue.

"We almost crashed. Did you see how close we came to the guardrail? Another foot to the left and we would have ..." I winced as she pressed on my cheekbone.

"I think you're going to live." She patted my knee.

"No fractured bones," Mom announced. Some color returned to her cheeks. Her voice was less shrill and she had slowed down a bit. She turned to Alex and put her hand on his chest.

“Both of your hearts are racing,” she said.

“Let’s go out and inspect the damage,” Dad said as he opened his door and slid his feet to solid ground. Mom opened the side door and jumped out.

“Boys, stay inside with the dogs,” Dad said.

I climbed into the driver’s seat and leaned my head out the window to hear my parents talk as cars flowed by. An unexpected shiver ran through me. The cool air that flowed in through the window on this partly sunny day didn’t cause the shakes. It was visions of mangled wreckage with our bodies lying crushed underneath which kept crowding into my brain. The traffic steering around our candy-apple red home-on-wheels distracted me until Dad spoke.

“That left front tire looks like it blew out,” Dad said, looking up from the ruined mess.

“We put on new tires before we left Texas to come to Germany,” Mom rubbed her furrowed forehead. “They’re speed rated for the Autobahn.”

As they talked, a German Polizei’s green and white sedan pulled up in front of the van. Two men wearing tan and green uniforms got out and walked over to Mom and Dad. After brief introductions, Dad explained what had happened. Both policemen squatted down to examine the tire.

The short, older cop with a mustache stood up. “Mr. Zanadu, we did not see any oil or liquid spill on the road near the skid marks of your tires. The road was slightly wet from an earlier rain. There also weren’t any sharp objects that might have cut your tire. Because these are new tires, that means someone must have intentionally slashed your tire to make it fail at highway speeds.” Crouching next to the tire, he pointed out the evidence to Dad. “Where do you normally park your vehicle?”

“We keep it in a locked parking garage or on the Army base where I work.”

The shorter cop tapped his mustache. “Maybe a criminal bypassed the security system in the parking garage.”

The second policeman nodded in agreement. “Do you need any assistance?”

“No,” Dad said. “I can put on the spare tire. We’re only a few kilometers from the Esso station. I can buy a new tire there.”

“Good,” the older guy said. “My partner will call ahead to ensure they have the right size. Who is with you?” He opened a notebook and moved closer to Dad. The young, black-haired man went back to the Polizei car to make a call.

“This is my family,” Dad said, pointing to each of us. “You’ve met my wife, Rachael. In the van are my two sons, fourteen-year-old Alexander and twelve-year-old Gabriel.”

“And what do you do?”

“I’m a Major in the United States Army.”

“Ah, I see.” The policeman smoothed his gray hair back over his head. “You and your family must be careful. Are you sure there is not another reason for an attack? Something you do at work?”

Dad looked at the ground, his face tightening for a second. He kept his answer simple. “I work for military intelligence, but I can’t talk about my activities. You understand.”

Hmmm. On a phone call he got from work during breakfast, didn’t he make a whispered comment—something about suspects—two young men who rode motorcycles? When I had asked him what was going on, he had told me not to worry.

“Alright,” the policeman said. “I understand. These questions are for my report.” He closed his notebook, checking the other tires for tampering. He didn’t find anything wrong. He walked back to his police car.

“The Esso station has the tires you need,” said the younger cop as he rejoined Mom and Dad. As the cop with the mustache came back, the younger one excused himself. Mom said goodbye and climbed into the van. I stayed in the driver’s seat to catch more of Dad’s talk with the cop.

“Mr. Zanadu,” the policeman said, “you are not going to like what I have to say.”

Dad nodded his head. “Go on.”

The policeman noticed I was listening. He grabbed Dad by the elbow and moved him further away.

It was hard, but by closing my eyes, concentrating, and ignoring the sounds of cars and trucks zipping past us, I could hear them.

The cop continued. "This is a tense time in Germany. The Berlin Wall may fall this year as we work to reunify East and West Germany by the end of next year, 1990. This political tension has increased the activity of extremists, especially against American military members, in order for them to get greater news coverage."

"Okay," Dad said. "Is there anything else?"

My heart went cold at what I heard next.

"Mr. Zanadu, someone may want you and your family dead."

Chapter 2

THE THREAT

Did I hear that right? Someone's trying to kill us?

The mustached cop said a few more things, but I didn't hear anything. I swallowed hard a few times and stared at the traffic. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Dad say goodbye to the cops, pivot, and stride back to the van. The policemen got into their car and drove away.

Twenty minutes later, Dad had finished changing the tire and we were back on the road, moving a bit slower.

"Dad, who did this to us?" Alex asked as we poked along.

"I don't know," he said, patting the steering wheel with his hand and looking away into the distance. "I checked the tires yesterday. They were fine. The vandals must have done this last night or while we were loading the van when I was talking to Herr Klaus."

That didn't make sense to me. "If it happened while we loaded the van and you talked with the landlord, the vandals would have to be invisible. Alex and I were racing up and down the stairs with all our stuff during that time."

“Honey, you can’t see everything,” Mom stroked Dad’s right arm, leaning toward him, her face still a bit pale. She changed the subject. “I’m glad you kept us on this side of the Autobahn and safe. Thank God we didn’t get hit by all the traffic around us.”

“What did the policeman mean about a criminal getting into our garage?” I asked. “And why did he say someone wants us dead?”

Mom’s eyes darted over to Dad and her eyebrows arched in a questioning fashion.

Dad grew silent for a moment, then spoke. “Our family needs to be careful. Be on the lookout for strange events. I am working on a special project, but it shouldn’t affect any of you.” Dad looked at Mom. He shook his head warning her not to talk about it right now.

Be careful? Look out for strange things? Like someone slicing our tires when we weren’t around? Imagine if we had wrecked. Our van would be on its side with our mangled bodies lying all around. I shuddered.

Dad pulled into an Esso station to fill up the tank and get a new tire.

“Bathroom break,” Mom said. “Boys, take the dogs for a short walk while we wait to see how long the repairs will take.”

Glad to have the break, I jumped out of the van. The ‘Go-Mobile.’ In Germany, we were always going someplace to sightsee. We took Thunder and Lightning on leashes to a large grassy area.

Thunder, a humongous mixed-breed of Great Dane and Greater Swiss Mountain Dog, stretched his seventy-five pound muscular body. At a year old, his bull-sized neck strained against Alex’s leash.

Alex yanked back. “Thunder, sit.”

Tail wagging, the jet-black giant obeyed.

Lightning danced around my feet, jumping into the air. Even at eleven months, he pranced like a pup. Bouncing. Hopping. Racing. Leaping. He never stopped. His mix of Shih-Tzu and Toy Whippet backgrounds made him as fast as a cheetah. With red-gold long hair streaming behind him, his fifteen-pound body could cover any distance like a ball of fire.

Once on the grass, we took the leashes off the dogs and watched them sniff around the area.

My stomach knotted up. “Someone’s out to kill us,” I said to Alex.

“Don’t be crazy,” Alex said. “We don’t know why this happened. Could’ve been a prank. Don’t get all worked up. It’s over. And I don’t want to think about it. Let’s talk about something else.”

Talk about something else? I don’t think so. We could all be lying on the highway, bleeding to death. But if I say that, he’ll think I’m a baby.

“Okay. I’m glad Dad found out the Schultzes will join us on vacation. Pete and I will have a blast.” Peter was my best German friend.

“Yeah. We’ll have a lot more fun with them along.”

“Pete’s great. But not Jenna,” I said. *Girls! Who needs them?* Jenna was a pain, always thinking she was so smart and bossing me around. She did like to hang around Alex a lot, like she had a crush on him. I snickered, “I bet you’re glad Jenna’s coming along. She’s a nice girlfriend for you.”

“She is NOT my girlfriend,” he hissed through his teeth.

He lunged at me. I scrambled away from him, dodging and darting back and forth. The dogs joined in the fun. Alex gave up when Dad’s whistle caught our attention. He waved us to come on back. Dogs in tow, we arrived to hear him say, “I spoke with the mechanic. He needs an hour to put on a new tire. We won’t reach the castle until sometime after lunch. We’ll stop along the way to eat at a town called Kaufering.”

“Boys, we can use this time to do some home-school activities,” Mom chimed in. “Get your backpacks from the van.”

“But we’re on vacation,” I folded my arms and pushed out my lower lip.

“Read one of your books, look through your castle study guides, or write a report about our adventure.” Mom said, pointing to the nearby grassy area. “You can sit over on that picnic table.”

Alex shouldered his backpack, strode to the table, pulled out a book, and started reading. I slung my pack on, put my hands in my pockets and shuffled to the side of the table opposite Alex. I kicked a few stones against the curb on my way. *I’d rather run than do schoolwork.* Because we were going to see a castle on vacation,

I pulled out the information on castles I had in my backpack. I ignored the ragged edges where Thunder and Lightning had tussled with the homework folder last night, throwing my papers everywhere. I put the papers in order, glancing at all the castles we could see in Germany and dreamt about exploring underground caves and tunnels. I stopped and studied Neuschwanstein castle, my favorite. It had square and round towers, winding staircases, and at least four levels. I even had an engineer's map I had found in a German library. It showed an underground tunnel between Neuschwanstein and nearby Hohenschwangau castle. When I showed Dad, he laughed and said the map was a hoax; the tunnel was only a legend. *But it looks real to me. Maybe he's wrong. This map might help me discover that mysterious tunnel.*

I needed a bathroom break. I left Lightning at the table and raced to the building. As I rounded the corner, I heard Mom's and Dad's voices in heated conversation on the other side of the garage bay. I stopped, straining to hear over the clang of a hammer on metal, fans humming in the work area, and engines revved up to full power.

"What do you mean the policeman said someone wanted us dead? And why didn't you tell me?" Mom waved her arms wildly in the air.

"Hon, he may be ..."

"Do you know what's going on?" she leaned forward. Her hand flew to her hip and she made slashing gestures with the other hand. "I've told you time after time, I don't like your dangerous job. You're gone long hours. You leave for weeks on end. And now we might get killed. This is about your job, isn't it?"

Dad stiffened his posture, took a step back, and shoved his hands in his pockets. "I'm trying to tell you what this might be about. I have no assurance ..."

"Right," Mom slammed her open hand on the wall. "No assurance. I can't take this. I knew you were in danger, but now the whole family could get hurt. What are you going to do about it?" Her cheeks were glistening with shiny wetness.

"Honey, let me finish." Dad spread his arms wide. "I don't have any control in this incident and I don't know that the policeman

was right. I'll check the car better in the future and be more aware of what's around us. My boss gave no indication we would be under a death threat. I'll check back with him. The only information I have is about two young hoodlums who have joined a gang or criminal organization. And I am working on a Top Secret project, but ...” Dad spotted me and stopped.

“Going to the bathroom,” I pointed and raced into the safety of the tiny room. I hadn't seen Mom upset like that since Dad went away for three months. When I jogged back to the picnic table, they weren't around the garage area. Swirling thoughts of gangs and secret projects kept my mind off of castles as I settled on the picnic table bench.

“Time to go.” Mom tromped through the grass towards us, puffy eyes the only sign she had been crying. “Schoolwork time is over.”

We resettled ourselves in the Go-Mobile and continued driving south. After stuffing the latest schoolwork inside my backpack, I played with my Gameboy.

I was in another world when Alex's fist slammed the top of my right thigh.

Chapter 3

STRIKE ONE

“Oww,” I said, grabbing my leg. “What’d you do that for?” I glared at him and swung my right arm to thump him on the chest, but he blocked me.

“Serves you right for saying earlier that I have a crush on Jenna.”

“What’s the matter? Is the truth a problem?”

“Boys, stop it!” Dad’s eyes and creased forehead in the rearview mirror let us know he was serious.

That stopped the action. I gave Lightning a quick stroke on the neck as he leaned on the armrest to look out the left window. Rubbing my leg, I looked daggers at Alex. *You’re going to get it!* Dad interrupted my thoughts and changed the subject.

“Since you two have lots of energy to burn, let’s review your homework.” He quizzed us on our home-schooling projects for an hour, before pulling off the road. “Here we are. This is Kaufering.”

As soon as the van stopped, Alex slammed open the side door, undid his seatbelt, and launched himself out of the van. I followed, jumping over his seat, and beating Thunder and Lightning out of the door. I bumped into Alex getting out of the van.

“Watch it!” he said, and shoved me so hard I rolled in the green grass and soft pine needles. Thunder and Lightning leaped out next. I chased Alex to the nearest picnic table with dogs trailing behind. *Freedom!* I loved running around.

Mom called us back just as I tackled Alex. “Boys, come here and unload the van for lunch.” Foiled at getting back at Alex, I trotted over to help Mom.

“Here,” she said, “put the picnic tablecloth on the ground. I want to sit next to the grass and flowers. After you spread the cloth, go play with the dogs until lunch is ready.”

“Okay.” I nodded and launched into action. While we unloaded things, Thunder and Lightning sprinted around the Go-Mobile and into the field, chasing each other back and forth, tumbling over each other, and racing back to us.

The weather had warmed up since breakfast. I didn’t need a jacket. A few puffy, white clouds hung in the sky’s brilliant blue background. The sun’s yellow rays cast strong shadows of the nearby trees on the green carpet of newly-mown grass and on the picnic table. Pine trees, elms, and oaks surrounded our clearing, which was about a football field in length. Some brown leaves had fallen on the ground, but the leaves on the elm and oak trees were changing colors to yellow, orange, and red. The calm, greenish-colored Lech River flowed sixty feet away, paralleling our picnic area.

“Lightning, here I come.” I tore out after him. I raced past Mom’s red-checkered tablecloth and the picnic tables to get closer to the river. For the next ten minutes, Alex and I sprinted after each other and our dogs. I’m sure as we flashed back and forth, we looked like a laughing, falling, pouncing, wrestling madhouse. At least, that’s how I felt.

“Boys, lunch is ready,” Mom said above the din.

The dogs, Alex, and I rolled around together and tangled into a pile as we grappled in the grass.

“Just a minute,” Alex called back to Mom.

Thunder growled as he jerked away from the pile with a stick clenched in his jaws.

Alex growled back at him. His shoulders tensed. Crouching, he grabbed the stick. He leaned back, straining to pull it out of Thunder's mouth. But the dog's powerful jaws and muscular body didn't give in. His paws, larger than Alex's fists, dug into the ground. He ripped the broken branch away from Alex.

"Let go, Thunder," Alex said. He swung one arm around Thunder's neck to separate the thick branch from his mouth, but Thunder wiggled his powerful head out of Alex's grip.

I'll get Thunder to drop that stick. I distracted him. "Lightning, catch," I said as I threw a tennis ball high in the air past Alex and Thunder.

Looking like a long-haired fox, Lightning flashed through Thunder's feet to get the bouncing ball. Thunder immediately let go of the stick to chase Lightning. Alex slammed back into a tree, sprawling onto the grass on his back.

Alex bellowed, "Come back here, Thunder."

"Thunder, leave Lightning alone," I said. "Lightning, get the ball."

Lightning caught the ball and eyed Thunder as he charged. Lightning zoomed down the bank of the river towards the water.

"Lightning, no. Not that way," I said, waving my hands as I ran towards the river.

"Boys, stay out of that water. For the second time, come to lunch," Mom said in a loud voice. She motioned for us to come back.

Mom's warning came at a good time for us, but it was too late for Thunder. Lightning made an immediate left turn at the water's edge, but Thunder's bigger size and weight kept him sliding forward through the mud, taking him right into the water. His legs churned frantically to stop the inevitable impact. *Sploosh!* Water flew in every direction.

I bent my knees, laughing until I had to hold my sides. "That's great," I choked out. *You dumb dog. Now you'll be in a heap of trouble.*

Thunder sat in a muddy pool of water up to his chest. His ears drooped as he looked back at Alex.

I kept chuckling at Thunder's predicament. Lightning trotted back to me with the ball in his mouth, head held high. "You look

like the winner.” I congratulated my fleet-footed friend and rubbed his head in a circular motion. *My dog is smarter.*

“Alexander, get your dog out of that water and cleaned up before we leave,” Dad said as he walked toward us. “But first, get up here for lunch right now. Your mother called both of you boys twice and we are still waiting for you. You’re both at strike one!”

“But Dad,” I protested. “It’s Alex and Thunder’s fault, not mine. Lightning and I didn’t do anything wrong.”

Arguing didn’t work. I was still in trouble and I was ticked off. *They never listen to my side of the story. It wasn’t my fault. We were just playing and Thunder couldn’t stay out of the water. He’s not my dog.* I slammed my feet into the ground striding back to the tablecloth. I made myself cool down on the way. *At least strike one is just the first warning. We still have two more strikes before we’re kaput. Done for.*

Alex said, “Thunder, you swim in the river over to those rocks downstream. Then come out of the water where there isn’t any mud and shake off.”

Alex and I had trained with Dad and our dogs, teaching them key words for obedience. Both dogs were smart. They did well most of the time. The key words Alex used for Thunder were “swim, rocks, shake off.”

While Thunder followed his instructions, the rest of us gathered at the tablecloth to eat lunch. I peeked while Dad said the usual prayers to bless the food and watched Thunder swim twenty yards downriver. After Dad finished praying, I munched on a peanut butter and honey sandwich and some chips as I tracked Thunder making his way out of the clear water.

Thunder clambered out onto the rocks, then he paused, staring at us and licking his chops.

Here we go, I thought. Looks like something broke his train of thought. He’s probably thinking “Swim, rock, FOOD!”

Thunder leapt from the rock, galloped across the grass like a small Shetland pony, and slid into the left side of the tablecloth near the dog food bowl. His wet body knocked a few food dishes around, but he didn’t seem to notice. He flopped his rear end on the ground, chowed down on his food, and drank his water.

Alex's eyebrows narrowed. He wrinkled his nose and scrunched his face into a disapproving frown, and said, "Thunder, you forgot something."

Thunder stopped eating and looked straight at Alex.

"I didn't say 'Swim, rock, FOOD.' What was the third command?"

Thunder barked as he stood up. River water dripped off his coat like raindrops. His body wiggled as he remembered the last command.

Alex cried out, "Duck!"

Too late. Thunder jumped further onto the tablecloth, showering us with water.

"Stop, stop!" we all yelled in unison. Mom and Dad threw their hands up to shelter their faces, but I threw myself on the ground and rolled left to get out of the spray. I leaped to my feet as Mom and Dad stood up, each of us wiping off our faces and clothes. Thunder had twisted the tablecloth, spilling and mixing the food containers. Then he tilted his head while looking at Alex, showing his confusion.

Exciting. That felt kind of good in the sunshine.

Dad's eyes fixed on Alex. With hands on his hips, disappointment poured out without a word being said. Finally, he pointed to a pine tree about fifteen feet away. "Alex, get your dog over to that tree. He can finish shaking off there. Go! Now!"

"And you will have to help clean up this mess when you get back," Mom said. "There are some extra towels for the dogs in the back of the van. Make sure Thunder is completely dry. Those dogs smell like dirty laundry when they're wet."

I leaned my head back and winked at Alex, hiding my smiling lips. *Back at you, brother. Serves you right for hitting me earlier. Now you've gotten in trouble twice. I'm looking pretty good.*

Mom and Dad checked out the damage. Without comment, they started packing things up.

No talking? That's not good. No talking usually meant big trouble.

Alex glared at me a couple of times while furiously towel-drying Thunder.

I helped load the Go-Mobile and soon we were back on the road—a two-lane country road with less traffic and slightly slower speeds. After ten minutes of rocky silence, Mom and Dad started talking again.

“I guess Thunder’s river-water shower woke us all up!” Dad chuckled a bit. “The water was cool and refreshing.”

“My clothes don’t show any stains. I guess we’re in good shape,” Mom said.

I tilted my seat back, smiling as I remembered the trouble Alex had gotten into with Thunder. *Better him than me. He always gets me in trouble.* I looked over at Alex, who ran his finger over his throat in a slashing sign. Then he pointed back at me. I didn’t care as long as I wasn’t in trouble.

Ignoring him, I said, “How much longer till we get there?”

“Looks like 3:30 P.M.,” Mom answered from her pile of maps.

I moaned inside. *Another two and a half hours in the van? This castle had better be pretty good or I’m gonna die from boredom.*

Suddenly, I heard a quick buzz as a single motorcycle zipped past, traveling a lot faster than we were. He wove in and out of traffic, slowing down as though waiting for us to catch up. Then he made a U-turn and flew past us in the other direction.

I twisted around to see where he had gone, but couldn’t track him.

Dad looked into his rearview mirror. “Here he comes again on our right side.”

“Look at that wheelie.” Alex swiveled halfway around. “He’s going to crash into us.”