

Chapter 1

The girl's laughter is still ringing in the car as if she were still in it.

It is dark, not a single star is out. A thick layer¹ of clouds covers the sleeping town like a feather bed. It is late after midnight. All youngsters should be in bed, save and sound². Even after a wild party to celebrate the beginning of the summer holidays.

Two shadows in long coats with a dog that looks like a black and white beer barrel³ on a leash⁴ can hardly manage to jump from the street onto the walkway in an effort to escape the rushing car. They save their lives and the fat dog's. He growls⁵ accusingly. The dog owners look at each other in the milky light of a street lamp. They shake their heads in anger.

"Irresponsible⁶! Absolutely irresponsible! The driver must be nuts! He could have killed Hamlet!", shrieks the old man and crumbles his rain hat between his hands.

The white haired lady bends down to the barrel-like dog and pats his head.

"Are you okay, my little sweetheart?"

"Damn bastards! Did you hear the volume of the music? One should report that car to the police!"

The man shakes his fist behind the car, but it has long vanished⁷, around the corner of the village hall, in the direction of the river.

"Let's do that, Honey! Call the police right away. Have you got the plate number⁸, Richard?"

The woman looks at her husband with a visible doubt in her face.

He puts up his hat again and frowns⁹.

"It was too quick, Heather. Really, when I looked up from Hamlet it was too far away."

The old lady shakes her head, but she smiles.

"As always, Richard, too slow! Not only that we don't sleep well, we are getting slow ..."

"Come on, Heather, we are not getting old. That car was quick as a rocket! And I would not wonder if we read about a speeding accident¹⁰ in tomorrow's paper."

The car crosses the bridge, without any respect for the lovely old buildings at its side and the beauty of the place. It races towards the next village south of Bath. The music

¹ layer – Schicht

² save and sound – gesund und munter

³ beer barrel – Bierfass

⁴ leash – Leine

⁵ to growl – knurren

⁶ irresponsible – unverantwortlich

⁷ to vanish – verschwinden

⁸ plate number – Nummernschild

⁹ to frown – die Stirn runzeln

¹⁰ speeding accident – Unfall wegen überhöhter Geschwindigkeit

is cranked up¹¹ to full volume. The hard rhythm of an old Metallica song hammers out of the boxes and makes even the high quality doors of the new Audi A 6 tremble¹². The vibrations mix with the still fresh memory of the laughter and the dance floor music from the party.

The red streetlights mean nothing. The car almost flies towards its destination.

As the car hits the high kerbstone¹³, where the broad city street meets the narrow country road, it starts to skid¹⁴. Two wheels are in the air. A screeching¹⁵ of metal on stone cuts the night, a symphony of energy, freedom and destruction. Somehow the car does not turn over¹⁶, it drops down to the road again, finds some grip of the old cobble stone pavement and rushes on.

At a sharp left turn in the countryside, where some post boxes and three green and blue dustbins indicate that a house is hidden behind the huge hedges, the car knocks down the dustbins, but it evades the post-boxes.

This time the car starts skidding severely¹⁷. It turns around in a circle in the middle of the road and glides down a dip¹⁸ which is wet from last day's rain. The car hits the green hedge on the right with its rear¹⁹. There must be a wall hidden under the green plants. The ugly²⁰ noise outside is even louder than the hammering music inside the car. But it does not come to a stop, it turns again, scratches along the wall with its side and finally bumps²¹ into an old beech tree²² on the right hand side of the road.

¹¹ to crank up – aufdrehen

¹² to tremble – zittern

¹³ kerbstone – Bordstein

¹⁴ to skid – schleudern

¹⁵ to screech – kreischen

¹⁶ to turn over – umkippen

¹⁷ severe – ernsthaft

¹⁸ dip – Abhang

¹⁹ rear – Heck

²⁰ ugly – hässlich

²¹ to bump – prallen

²² beech tree – Buche