
1 *Busted*

I floored the gas pedal and the silver Lamborghini whined like a jet, acceleration thrusting us back into the grey leather seats. The sports car sliced through the almost deserted district on the edge of downtown, abandoned stores and warehouses on either side of the street zipping past our windows in a blur. The road ahead lay empty, apart from a few pieces of litter that had been caught by a puff of wind.

The speedometer hit one-sixty. Red and blue lights flashing in the side mirror showed the police cruiser, still less than a block behind us—two 12-year-olds on the run, accused of a crime we didn't commit.

In the passenger seat beside me, my twin sister Casey looked back over her shoulder. "Faster!" she shouted above the blaring siren.

"Uh-uh. Look." I nodded toward the view through the windshield. Staring down a dead end just a few blocks ahead, *faster* wasn't an option.

I searched for somewhere—an alley, a side road—where we could lose them.

"Simon, look out!"

A white delivery truck lurched out of an alley to our left.

While Casey grabbed the dashboard, bracing for a crash, I cranked the steering wheel hard.

We skidded right, tires squealing, missing the truck's front bumper by a hair.

"Simon!" Casey yelled as we barreled straight toward a vacant store.

I yanked the steering wheel back to the left, but too late. "Hold on."

The front tires hit the curb, hurling us both forward against our seat belts; then we were airborne. The sports car soared over the sidewalk and smashed through the store window.

For one bizarre moment, the world around me moved in ultra-slow motion. We glided through the air in a shower of shattered glass, heading for a lonely mannequin standing guard in the deserted shop. As the Lamborghini descended, its gracefully sloping hood clipped off the dummy's bald head, flipping it back onto the windshield with a crack, and then off out of sight. You don't see that every day.

We landed with a jolt that snapped our chins to our chests. I hauled on the steering wheel and jammed the brakes, but it didn't help. With a din of clanging and crashing, the sports car plowed through a clutter of old shelving and boxes. The impact tossed us around like rag dolls as the car slid along the brick wall on the far side of the shop before halting with a bone-rattling thump when it hit the back wall. The Lamborghini's engine snarled one last time, then fell silent.

I shook my head and took a breath to collect my wits. Was that blood on my jeans? No. Jam from breakfast. I seemed to be all right.

As a loose brick dropped from the wall onto the fender, I turned to my sister. "Are you okay?"

She nodded.

Then remembering the police, I said, "Let's go."

Casey threw her door open and jumped out. Since my side was pressed firmly against the wall, I followed her, clambering over the gearshift.

Stepping out into the cloud of dust that we'd kicked up, I blinked and rubbed my eyes with my sleeve.

Total quiet. No siren. *Where were they?* Beyond the big opening that used to be the store window, we could see the truck stopped in the middle of the road. The driver's door hung open, but no one was in sight.

Casey and I exchanged glances, then jogged forward. Almost there, the sound of voices out in the street stopped us in our tracks.

I raised a finger to my lips and crept ahead.

Peeking out the right side of the window, my eyes followed a trail of skid marks to the police cruiser, a block or so away, its front end crumpled against the side of an overfull garbage dumpster. The bin had once contained even more trash, but much of its slimy contents had spilled out onto the previously shiny vehicle.

The truck driver, helping the officers out of their car, spotted us and pointed in our direction.

“Let’s go!” I jumped out onto the street, darted off to the left and cut down a narrow alley between the store and an old brick warehouse.

Back in the street, one of the officers barked into his radio, “Unit 511 requesting backup.” I looked over my shoulder: They still hadn’t reached the alley.

“Simon!” Casey, two strides behind me, pointed ahead into the shadows.

Another dead end.

Our pursuer continued his message. “We are on foot in pursuit of two suspects—juveniles: one male, one female . . .”

“They’re getting closer,” Casey said. “We’ll never make it!”

We stopped. Looking forward and back, I nodded. “Then this is where we make our stand.” I reached for the gun tucked in the waist of my jeans.

“Are you nuts? We can’t—”

The officers rounded the corner.

Casey dove for cover behind a garbage bin.

I drew my weapon. “Freeze, coppers!”

They skidded to a halt. One threw his hands up.

The other looked hard at me. Stepped forward. “Simon?”

I sat up with a jerk. My teacher, Mr. Grundy, stood near the front of the classroom, eyebrows raised. “Daydreaming *again*?”

Thirty pairs of eyes burned into me. Then my classmates burst into a chorus of laughter.