

THE GOLDEN ORB: PRELUDE – VOL. 1

CHAPTER FIVE

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Abby and Kepler enter Cooper Academy's grand auditorium. A student audience is gathered to one side of the range of seats. An anticipating quiet echoes throughout the great structure and a figure appears from behind the curtains. A lean teenager wearing a Spider-Man costume walks out with the sound of his crutches squeaking and his medical boot on his right foot ahead of him. The junior high and high school teacher judges sit silently on the right side of the stage. Suddenly, the backing track for "Tequila" plays through the auditorium speakers.

The two friends look at the auditioner on the stage. He "performs" before the group of three teacher judges who begin to look amongst themselves confused. The junior high student remains standing on stage, unmoving. He continues to rest on his crutches before the microphone while wearing his costume. At the end of the song, the junior high student leans into the microphone and simply says...

"Tequila."

The crowd of spectating students goes wild.

"There's our boy," Abby says.

The seventh and eighth graders now eat at the same time at different lunch tables. Kepler, Abby, and Nolan sit at the same one. Nolan watches at a group of kids talking while standing in the distance. "It's so weird now that no one wears a backpack," he says. Then, he turns back to his friends.

"How'd y'all like my performance?"

Abby laughs heartily. Kepler chuckles as well.

"Did you make it in?" Abby asks.

"I don't know. The results come out next week," Nolan said.

"Don't hold your breath."

"What do you mean by that?" He cocked his head light-heartedly.

"Ay, careful," Kepler warned. "She'll break your other leg."

"My leg isn't broken."

"What are you wearing that boot for then?"

“Come on, you know.”

“Why don’t we tell Abby what happened?”

“Let’s not.”

Some nights before, Kepler slept on the couch in Nolan’s living room of a modest home, lower upper-class. He awakened to a light touch on his head along with the sound of buzzing. Kepler felt his head itchy, and he touched it first with the tip of his finger. Then, he flattened his full palm on the now hairless surface. He immediately turned his head to look up and found Nolan finishing the shaving of his head. Kepler gasped disapprovingly.

“Nolan!” he yelled.

Nolan flicked the razor switch off. “Kepler.”

“You bastard!” Kepler said angrily.

Nolan darted away and Kepler chased after him. Nolan yelled fearfully then laughed gleefully as he ran. However, he did not see the incoming cable connected to a charging laptop laid haphazardly across the ground and tripped on it hard.

“Ah-ow!!” he exclaimed in a high-pitch tone upon hitting the hardwood floor.

Abby is laughing so hard that her head is flat on the table.

Kepler continued to tell the story. “You should have heard him shriek. It was like a Mexican call. He sounded like..” Kepler begins to laugh. “He sounded like Gosling in ‘The Nice Guys’ when he gets the spiral fracture.” Kepler attempts to do the same scream softly.

“Stop it man. It’s not funny,” Nolan says. “It hurt.”

Abby and Kepler continue to laugh.

“Okay, man. Guess what?”

“What?” Kepler asks.

“Ambien.”

“What?!”

“Bro, just stop talking!” Abby states.

Nolan reaches for one of his crutches that are leaned up against the table. In a classroom up above, Jonathan looks out the window at the three friends three stories below. He watches intently.

The tall high school senior with a short, clean hair cut enters his home upon unlocking the front door after the school day. He sets down his car keys on the stand right beside the front door once inside and takes his phone out of his pocket to make a call.

Jonathan walks into the office and remains standing as he places his smartphone beside his ear. “Hi, Emme. I need you and Marc to follow the child of Anthony and Penelope Luna.”

Emme speaks on the other end of the phone call.

Jonathan Barden responds. “Yes. His name is Nolan. Do any other necessary observing if required.”