

THE GOLDEN ORB: PRELUDE – VOL. 1

CHAPTER SIX

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A red corvette stationed at the nearly empty parking lot behind Cooper Academy was approached by Nolan. His crutches squeaked on the way over. Nolan entered the sports car and the two brothers turned to face each other.

“Did you make it into the talent show?” Tommy said.

They both laughed from the bottom of their stomachs. Tommy started the car, and they drove away merging onto the main street. A sedan parked in the school’s lot started as well and followed after them into the moving current of the street.

Thomas and Abby headed home after school in the red Altima. Abby’s big brother drove the vehicle. He looked behind them through his rearview mirror where he found something odd. The car behind the one directly behind them weaved out of its lane slightly, as if it were taking a peek at them. When they arrived at an intersection’s green light, Thomas made an unexpected left turn, narrowly missing the incoming traffic. The trailing vehicle continued forward to maintain with the current of traffic thereby losing sight of Abby and Thomas.

Kepler pedaled into a neighborhood on his bike while two of Barden’s people watched from within a parked black sedan. Marc and Jessica saw a baby Dutch rabbit, orange chicken, and small purple dragon with a goatee from within the car. The creatures stood in a basket mounted at the front of Kepler’s bike.

He now licked the two spheres of ice cream on his cone while sitting outside a Baskin Robbins at one of its tables. Chicken, Wabbit, and Crazy Joe sat atop the table, each ate their ice cream in different ways. Wabbit ate by lowering her head to a small Styrofoam bowl and Crazy Joe ate from a waffle bowl with a tiny plastic spoon in one paw. Chicken held a small cone with two spheres of ice cream on it, a lot for a stuffed animal.

“How am I supposed to eat this?” the fowl asked.

Kepler laughed. “Any way you like, Chicken.”

“Okay, then.”

“Do you guys like it?”

Kepler saw the creatures – the Peluches - eating. They all looked up contently, having tasted sugar for the first time, and nodded.

“Good. Good,” Kepler said.

“When are we going to be able to talk to your sisters?” Wabbit inquired.

“Soon, Wabbit, soon,” he assured. Kepler licked his ice cream cone.

“That’s specifically vague,” Crazy Joe said.

“Well, you know.”

“Not really, actually,” Chicken responded.

Kepler took a moment as he developed his answer. “People escalate things too quickly. Complicate them. My sisters and parents and friends are not a part of this, but most normal people are. They are full of greed and desire. What would happen if the public or criminals found out about you? What would they use you for? My guess, to get rich, in whatever way they can.”

The Peluches considered this momentarily.

“Well, you know more about humans than we do, Dad,” Wabbit stated.

“I guess so,” Kepler said sadly.

Someone watched Kepler through a monocular lens. He felt eyes upon himself and furrowed his brows. Kepler turned over and looked straight into the monocular. He developed a look of surprise. The seventh grader was so far away that his “Huh!” was inaudible to the spy.

“Uh-oh. I think he’s spotted us,” Emme said.

Kepler turned back to the Peluches. The monocular lens also moved to face the stuffed animals. The Peluches were now looking straight into the monocular lens. The lens shifted its view back toward Kepler.

“He is gone,” Emme confirmed.

She turned her telescope device back toward the creatures. “Crap, they are gone!”

The lens shifted frantically as they searched for Kepler and his tiny friends. They finally spotted Kepler hurriedly and funnily speeding away in his bike, as fast as his legs could muster. Emme and Marc sat in their “hidden” sedan. Emme lowered the monocular and Marc turned to her. She remained thinking.

Emme and Marc made their way out of the several-storied parking garage and approached a skyscraper in the middle of downtown Phoenix. After making their way past the single security guard and up the elevator, Jonathan’s right-hand employees entered his work office after knocking on the door. He raised his gaze from his laptop screen at his desk. They exchanged pleasantries.

“What’s up?” Jonathan asked.

Emme had entered first and Marc shut the door. “We’ve done some legwork,” Marc said.

“And we’ve got other people following potential leads,” Emme continued.

“We’ve got Tommy, Kepler, and Abby covered. We think it’s better to go after the children since they have no resources themselves if not hanging around their parents.”

“Tommy is too wild as well, so we went after the children, Abby and Kepler. Abby spends much time with her parents and brother. Kepler has his parents and two sisters; however, he has been more distant from them as of late. And another thing.”

Emme and Marc shared a glance. Emme gave him a don’t-do-it look.

“Kepler has live-” Marc began.

“We should go after Kepler,” Emme interrupted. “He still plays with stuffed animals...outside.”

“Still plays with his puppets,” Jonathan nearly chuckled. He shifted to his normal tone. “The three friends are tightly knit?”

“Very,” Marc reinforced.

“Go after Kepler. He’s the way to get to Nolan.”