Relics #5:

Inadequate

By Jonathan Gutheinz





Twitter: @gutheinz

First Printing: USA 1/20/2021

**Other Books in WarZone**

Dawn of War

Mario Chronicles

Warzone

Tales

Chronicles

Outsiders

**Chapter One**

Caliskan’s Auto was a respectable business in the heart of Goynuk Turkey, or at least that’s what Omar Caliskan told himself. It was after all; his primary means of income for himself and his family. He had inherited it from his father, who likewise received it from his, who in turn cheated their brother-in-law out of the family business. A fact that always brought a smile to Omar’s face when dealing with his cousin, who now worked for him. Fate always had a way of rewarding those who were worthy of such favor, while dealing devastating blows to those who were weak.

Much like his current victim, or that is to say, customer. Berat Yilmaz, an ironic name if Omar had ever heard one, came in to buy a car. It seemed he was new in town and his car had given out on the way to his job at Dinopark, a local amusement part in town. Omar had never been. When he was a child his father never saw the use for such distractions. A boy should be focused on more proper things, a lesson he had passed down to his son. Even now, Omar’s oldest was working at the shop. Fixing up cars, answering calls. Whatever Omar needed doing and didn’t want to pay others to do. It was a son’s job.

“I just need something reliable.” Berat said, his voice cracking as he said it. Almost as if speaking caused him immense discomfort. He was an overly thin, to the point of looking more akin to a child than a full-grown man. He kept his head hung low, even when speaking. It seemed he had no self-confidence. Omar’s favorite trait in a costumer.

“Have no fear. Omar has you. Every car here is the picture of reliability. Otherwise, I wouldn’t sell it.” Omar said, leading the sucker through the rows of cars in his backlot. Half of which were unrepairable. The number of times he sold a car that worked just well enough to get the person home, he had lost count of. It always warmed his heart, knowing he unloaded a waste of space piece of junk, and made a profit doing it. After all, that’s what business was about, screwing people over and getting rich doing it.

Berat made his way over towards an older light blue Anadol SL. He eyed the car with some kind of wonder. This would have been an easy sell, if it wasn’t for the fact that Omar had used the engine from the car to fix up another car he had sold the week before. He was all for selling a junker, but it still had to drive off the lot.

“You have a good eye.” Omar said, walking up behind Berat. He had to play this carefully, move him away from this undrivable piece of shit and onto something he could quickly unload, all the while not letting on that he’s been lying this whole time. “But if you like this style, I have the perfect car for you. Much the same aesthetic, but far more class. Much more befitting a man of your status.”

Without waiting for a reply, Omar guided Berat away from the car and down the row of useless cars that he was determined to sell. Which car he was going to pawn off on this sucker, he didn’t know yet. That was part of the fun. It was a calling that he was well suited to, after all, he was a respectable businessman.

No sooner were Omar and Berat out of sight than Leo popped his head up. He had been hiding in the very same Anadol SL that they were looking at moments before. Luckily, the owner believed the car undrivable. It was the very reason that Leo had picked this car to fix up. It meant there was no chance they would attempt to sell it. It gave him the time he needed to fix it up.

It had taken him a couple days, not bad for someone who knew nothing about cars just a few days ago. A statement he could no longer make. As soon as he laid eyes on the cars, he knew everything he needed to. If he had wanted to, he could have taken them all apart and put back together again. He could also tell you the history of each car. Where they were built, who had worked on them, who had driven them and where. His powers seemed to be growing each and every day. Threatening to overwhelm him. Most days he could manage the headaches, the nosebleeds, the brutal onslaught of information that threatened to turn his brain to mush. Other days it still caused him to pass out. It was the enteral curse to his incredible gift. One that he was willing to live with, even if it ended up costing him everything.

He quickly made his way through the back streets, finally coming to a stop at the hole in the wall motel that his friends were waiting for him at. The second to last room on the second floor. It was one of the few rooms that was vacant. They had arrived a few days before, found an empty room in a dead motel and moved in. Every day they would change rooms, moving into one that had just been vacated, so as to not get caught. All the while, Leo would go out into the world and steal them a car. He would find one that wouldn’t be missed for a few days. They would then take the car and split town. Ditching the car somewhere outside of town in a spot not likely to be found for a while and make it into town on foot. They have repeated this overkill in caution a half dozen times since ditching Dr. Geller. Not that they had much choice, not after he used his connections to have the police start looking for them. It seemed almost every town they were in, the police started hunting them down in a few days. It didn’t take Leo long to figure out they were tracking their phones. Those went out the window, cutting them off from the outside world for good. It was hard on everyone, Cordelia most of all. She worried about their mother, a concern that Leo shared, in private if not out loud. He had to keep them alive, he couldn’t have the luxury of being scared.

“Leo! You’re back.” Cordelia, his little sister gave him a big hug the second he was back in the door. She was doing her best to hold back her new found strength. It was her gift from the machines underneath the pyramids.

“I’m fine, just like I always am.” He replied, not trying to be rude, but she was starting to smother him. He could see just how worried she was about him. How worried she was about everything since they had gone on the run. How worried they had all gotten since their worlds turned upside down.

“Don’t be so hard on her, Leo. It’s been tough on all of us, and every time you go out there by yourself, we don’t know if you’ll make it back.” Draco said, defending Leo’s little sister, not just because he really believed it, but because part of him liked her. He had never noticed it before. It was something he would have to address at some point, but today was not that day.

“I know, I’m sorry. I’ve just had a long day.” Leo answered, attempting to side step the issue. The others seemed to accept his excuse as they started to get ready to go. They all knew the drill, as soon as he came back with a car, it was time to split.

“Where to now?” Shaw asked, he was holding up worst than the others. He was never one to do well under pressure, and this was a lot of pressure for anyone to be under. Leo just hoped he could keep it together for a while longer. Just till he could figure a way out of all this.

“Drive till we run out of gas, just like always.” Leo said. He figured the farther they got from Egypt the better off they would be.

“This isn’t going to keep.” Draco pointed out.

“What else can we do?” Cordelia asked.

“I don’t want to run into Dr. Geller again.” Shaw added.

“I don’t think any of us do.” Cordelia said, far harsher than she would have if it was anyone else.

“It’s not forever!” Leo all but yelled. Regretting it instantly. They did everything they could not get caught. They didn’t even turn on the lights in the different motel rooms. The last thing he needed to do was yell and draw attention to themselves. “Just, till I figure out how to get us out of this.”

**Chapter Two**

The drive was usually silent. Leo drove without saying a word. Cordelia wished he would open up to her. They had never been that close. He was always off doing his own thing. Living his own life, while she chased after him trying to keep up. It was their way. Something that she was trying to change. She was here only because she wanted a relationship with him. Wanted to be close.

Draco and Shaw, normally arguing in the back seat, sat there quietly. Looking out the windows, watching the world pass them by. This wasn’t supposed to be how their lives went. They had a once in a lifetime opportunity to have an internship people would kill for, instead it turned into one that they might die from. Some twist of fate.

After what felt like hours, they arrived outside of yet another town, Cordelia missed the name. They ditched the car and started inward on foot. This was the worst part of every move. They would always ditch the car outside of town, somewhere we they thought no one would find it, at least not for a while, and then head into town on foot. Find a small, out of the way motel and hole up for a few nights while Leo went into town to find the next car they would steal.

They did it over and over. This is what their life became. An endless, repetitive cycle with no end in sight. It was enough to make her want to scream. She didn’t, but she wanted to.

“This as good a place as any.” Shaw said, as they approached the second motel in town. Leo had passed up the first one. Said it wouldn’t work for their needs. His glasses allowed him to see the truth of things. Whatever the hell that meant. All she knew was that Leo knew things, things that seemed to keep them out of trouble. So, she planned to keep listening to him, at least till they managed to get this all sorted out and head home.

“It works.” Leo said after a few minutes of looking at the motel. A few more seconds went by and he pointed at the third door from the end on the second floor. “That room.”

“Here we go again.” Draco said as they started to make their way to the room in question. Leo made short work of the lock on the door, the rest of them made it inside before anyone else could see them.

“Not bad.” Shaw said, looking at the small dingy room. It had two beds, an old tv and a small minifridge. “Not even an AC unit.”

“Stop bitching.” Cordelia said, putting her bags down on one of the beds. Shaw locks on the bed, his eyes darting to the second bed.

“Do you guys think I could get the second bed this time?” Shaw asked, his voice shaking. He already knew the answer to the question, he just figured it couldn’t hurt to ask.

“No!” Everyone answered at once. It was the answer he was already expecting, although the fact that Cordelia, who had nothing to gain either way, joined in, hurt him more than he cared to say.

“Okay.” Was the only reply he gave as he opened his bag and started to make a spot to sleep on the floor, between the bed and the wall. “This is fine.” He said more to himself.

Attempting to find what little comfort he could in his new life, as shitty as it was.

“Should we just give him the bed?” Draco whispered to Leo, looking at how pathetic Shaw looked on the floor.

“It’s up to you man, it’s your turn. I was going to take the couch.” Leo said, flashing the first smile he’s had in a while. Shaw looked over, an almost hopeful look upon his face.

“So that would mean I get the floor?” Draco asked, mock horror in his voice?

“Fraid so.” Leo said, as he started to set up the couch in the corner as his bed.

“Fuck that, maybe at the next motel.” Draco said.

“Unlikely.” Leo said. A downtrodden Shaw went back to work on his makeshift bed.

In the corner that Shaw had made up to sleep in, now sat Draco. It was late, the darkness in the room near complete. He had caved in and swamped places with Shaw. Letting him have the bed while he in turn took the floor. It wasn’t the most uncomfortable spot he had ever slept in. Although, truth be told, he didn’t think he was going to get much sleep. He had been restless almost since this all started. More and more so every day.

He did his best to hide just how inadequate he felt. They had all been given an incredible fate, having powers bestowed upon them and while the others all seemed to be embracing their powers and growing with them, Draco was no closer to mastering his. He had no idea how they worked, only that their source was his grandfather’s old watch and that it had to do with time.

He slowed down time once. At the time he believed that he had been moving at some increased speed, as if he was the Flash or something. It was only after learning that his powers were coming from his grandfather’s stop watch, that he figured out, he wasn’t moving fast, he had slowed down time. Watch equals time. It wasn’t that hard to figure out. The only problem was that he had only once, in the weeks since they gained these gifts, actually used them. Leo, Shaw and Cordelia could use their powers whenever they felt like it. Nothing stood in the way. What the difference was, he couldn’t figure out. Draco always liked to be in control, at least of his own little world. Yet now he had no power, no control. He was lost in a sea of despair that he managed to keep at bay during the day while the others saw him, but at night when he was alone with his thoughts, it threatened to drown him.

At last, it became too much, he got to his feet and slowly opened the door, careful not to wake anyone else up. He quickly made sure that he had one of the room keys in his pocket before slipping out. The cool night air was refreshing, relaxing. He couldn’t help but feel this was what he needed, some cool night air and some peace and quiet.

He just had to be sure to avoid being seen. Every town they went to had wanted posters for their arrest. Dr. Geller went overboard trying to track them down. He wanted the information they had on hand. He wanted their new found powers, even if he didn’t know for sure that they had them.

Once he was far enough away from the motel, he pulled out his pocket watch and started playing around with it. Attempting to alter time in any way shape or form. He kept his eyes glued the street, the occasional car driving by. He was looking for any sign that his gift was working, but none showed. It was another setback, one in a long line since this whole internship had started.

Shaw pulled the covers over his head, unready to face the day. He was dreading his task of finding a computer and looking up just how wide spread Dr. Geller’s lies about them had spread. Part of him, a large part of him, didn’t want to find out. What if it was worldwide? What if the FBI was after them? What if Interpol was after them? What if Dr. Geller had had their parents arrested? There were so many different fears that kept running through his head. It caused him to toss and turn all night. The irony of finally getting to sleep in a bed again, only to have it ruined with fear wasn’t lost on him.

The sound of the door opening forced him to finally acknowledge that he was awake. He looked up in time to see Draco walking in with a newspaper. Their picture on the front page. Draco held it out for them all to see.

“Well, we made the cover.” He looks at it again. “No idea what it says, but they want us.”

“You know what it says. Yet again, our foe has beat us here.” Leo said, his stuff already packed back up. “We’re going to have to be quick.”

“Do you guys still want me to look for a computer?” Shaw asked, hoping to get out of it.

“Only if you can. I think it’s best we stay as close to the room as possible.” Leo said, giving Shaw a sad smile. Shaw couldn’t help feeling as if Leo could read his fear. “But we do need you to steal us some more food.”

“On it.” Shaw said, getting to his feet. His most important job in every new city was getting them food. Stealing them food. He had gone his whole life not stealing anything. Never even being tempted and suddenly he was stealing tons of food every few days. He couldn’t help but feel as if he had turned his back on God. The only way he could justify it, was to remind himself that it was the only way they could eat. The only way they could survive. Dr. Geller was cutting off every avenue to them. He pretended to be their friend, to be a teacher, an educator, a good man. All lies.

The second Cordelia came out of the bathroom he went in. He wanted to wash off the sweat. He never used to sweat so much in his sleep, but now every morning when he woke up, he was soaked. It was horrible, disgusting. He was really looking forward to a nice hot shower. Giving him a chance to relax a little bit before going into the world to get potentially caught. Imagine his dismay when he turned on the shower, only to find that Cordelia had used all the hot water, leaving him to take a freezing cold shower. A shitty start to what promised to be a shitty day.

**Chapter Three**

Cordelia was glad to have some time alone with Draco. They hadn’t had any real alone time since their lives got turned upside down. The four of them were so crammed together. This was a nice change of pace. They decided to go out for a walk, they had to be careful not to be recognized, so they did their best to avoid going anywhere too crowded.

“Are you okay?” Cordelia asked. Draco had been getting more and more withdrawn. Not that she could blame him, this had been hard on all of them. Cordelia herself was stressing out about her mother. Her mother was always a worrywart, ever since their father had passed. She could only imagine how freaked out she was now, not having heard from them in weeks. If the lies about them had leaked out to the states, to her mother, it would break her. Cordelia did her best to not let it eat away at her. A task that she was failing out. A task that it seemed Draco was failing out as well.

“Fine.” He said, clearly lying. She wished he would open up to her. Tell her what was plaguing his mind. She could help. She wasn’t sure how, but she knew she could. She could be there for him. Help him. After all, they were all they had left. Their world was coming apart more and more every day. All around them.

“You know I’m here for you.” She said, attempting to push him to open up. She knew he didn’t feel about her the way she felt about him, but that didn’t mean she didn’t still want to be close to him. To feel a connection with him. If he would only let her.

“Imdat!” Cordelia was pulled out of her own thoughts by the scream. Nearby a woman was being cornered by a group of men, who clearly meant her no good. Cordelia watched in horror; it was something out of a movie. In the course of their walk, attempting to avoid people, they had ended up in a back alley, behind some buildings. It seemed they weren’t the only ones back here. These men clearly had ill intents with that poor woman. Someone needed to help her. Cordelia knew it had to be her, but she couldn’t make herself move. She was scared.

“Hey! Get away from her!” Draco called out, rushing to the woman’s defense. He had wasted no time from hearing her call out to attempting to help. It was heroic. Yet another reason that she liked him so. She wished she could be that brave.

The men turned to see Draco rushing at them, they brandished knives and other sharp weapons. Cordelia’s heart leap into her throat, she had never been so scared in her life. She didn’t know what she would do if anything happened to Draco. One of the men lunged at him, Draco sidestepped him and knocked him aside, before he could do anything else a second man hit him in the face. He went down hard. The man he had knocked down got back to his face, screaming. She had no idea what he was saying, but from his tone she could tell he was angry. He picked back up his knife, the others started kicking Draco, taking out their frustration on him. The woman, who only moments ago, was their main target took the opportunity to run. Draco wanted to save her, it seemed he succeed, but it had cost him. The man he knocked down barked something at his friends and they backed up, giving him space to close in on the wounded Draco.

The fear that had paralyzed her moments ago fled her body. She couldn’t let anything happen to him. She had to help him. She could feel the adrenaline rush through her body as she closed in on them. She picked up two of the thugs and tossed them aside as if they were nothing. The man with the knife stopped in his tracks, his eyes locked on her, expressing the fear that she had felt moments before. The last man who had been kicking Draco hit her in the face, hoping to do damage to the woman who had tossed his friends aside. She hardly felt it. Without even looking at him she hit him, sending him flying through the alley and heard him hit the wall, letting out a cry.

The man with the knife dropped it and took a few steps back. Clearly scared out of his mind. Cordelia took a step towards him and he took off running, screaming his head off as he went. She bent down next to Draco to make sure that he was okay.

“Draco?” she said, hoping that he would respond, but terrified that he wouldn’t.

“Thanks for the save.” He said, attempting a smile through the pain. She pulled him into a tight hug. “You’re hurting me!” he cried out.

“Sorry.” She said, letting go of him. She helped him to his feet, he was clearly hurt.

“No need, you saved me.”

“You were so brave.” She told him, smiling at him. She meant it, but could tell that he didn’t believe it. His pride had been hurt, she could see it in his face, but he was far too nice to ever admit it. He brushed off her compliment and asked her she wanted to go back to the room, he wanted to get cleaned up before Leo came back. She agreed, hoping that he didn’t resent her. They made their way back to the motel in relative silence. It wasn’t that Draco seemed mad, or upset, just distant. There was something going on with him that he didn’t want to share. At least not with her, and her saving him seemed to only make it worse.

No matter where you go in this world, a grocery store is more or less a grocery store. It had food and more importantly, it had people buying food. Most of them were disinterested in anything but getting what they needed and getting out of there. No one liked grocery shopping, at least not anyone that Shaw had ever met, and that was his saving grace. That was the fact he kept reminding himself, to keep from stressing out at the task he was asked to preform over and over again. Yet, no matter how many times he told himself that no one was paying attention to anything other than their own wants and needs, he still couldn’t shake the fear that they would notice him. Invisible or not. He was going to be seen, going to be caught. He was going to get the others caught as well, it was unavoidable. He wouldn’t be able to protect them, he couldn’t even protect himself. He was useless.

He tried to keep these thoughts in check, but they would always come back, no matter how many times he tried to convince himself it wasn’t true. A lifetime of experiences knew better. No one cared about him, not really. No one but Leo. Leo had always looked out for him. Always kept him safe and made him feel included. All he wanted to do was make him proud, but part of him knew he could never do that. Nothing about him could inspire pride in anyone, least of all Leo. A man who excelled at everything he put his mind too. A man who was best friends with Draco, possibly the only person on the planet who was as talented as he was. The two of them were a perfect fit. Add in Cordelia, the smartest, cutest girl in their whole school and it was easy to see who the odd man out was. Who the odd man out, always was. Shaw.

Doing his best to keep a light foot, Shaw walked through the grocery store, grabbing what food he could and placing them in a bag he had tapped up inside his sweater to his shirt. It was not an easy task, he would have to pick up the food, which could still be seen, and place it inside the bag which he couldn’t see, all the while doing his best to not make any sounds. The more he filled up the bag, the more noise it would make as he walked. He was asking to get caught, downright begging for it, but he didn’t have any other ideas on how to get the food out of the store.

The only option he felt he had, was to work quickly. Get as much food as he could and get out of there before anyone noticed. So far, in each city that they had gone too, he had managed it just fine. Here and there he would get looks, almost as if the person could see him, but once he stopped moving, staying perfectly still, going so far as to even hold his breath, the person would shrug it off and go on their way. People lived with a set of expectations, and whenever something in life didn’t meet them, they were more than likely to write it off. That was the only real power that Shaw had. No one wanted to believe that something invisible was stealing food, so even if they saw something that might suggest it, they would write it off and go about their way.

The one thing Shaw never expected was McCloud, an influencer of growing popularity on youtube, who believed his own hype a bit more than he had any right too. His gimmick, as it were, was to ‘prank’ people and get a reaction from them. Now how much of his pranks were funny, or really even anything more than him being an obnoxious jackass, is hard to say. What is not hard to say, is that his latest prank, while on vacation, was to have one of his friends, with a camera go around the other side of the aisle, so they could get the shot of the ‘prank’, while McCloud and the second cameraman stood in wait.

Shaw, normally hyper vigilant when it came to making sure no one was around, didn’t spot the strange man with a camera coming around the end of the aisle, nor did he realize just how much noise he made when he dropped what he hoped was a can of chili into his bag. What happened next wasn’t his fault, but knew as soon as it was done, Cordelia and Draco would have his head. Worst of all, Leo would give him the look of disappointment that he has seen far too often from his close friend.

“Woooo!” McCloud screamed, sounding very much like Nature Boy Ric Flair, as he spun around the corner and sent a shopping cart flying down the aisle. A look of deep confusion on his face as soon as the shopping cart was out of his hands.

“Where they go?” His friend with the camera next to him asked. McCloud could only shrug. The man on the other end seemed equally confused. Most confused of all, was Shaw, who stood, glued to his spot, watching the cart come at him in shock. He didn’t move out of the way, he didn’t try to stop what was coming, he just stood there as the cart hit him, knocking him on the ground and the hood off his head. His bag of stolen groceries paid the ultimate price, ripping open. The stolen good spilling out onto the floor, causing far more noise than it had any right to. It was almost as if fate was damning Shaw for all his theft. That, or the deafening sound it made was only the amplification of it in his own head as his fear of getting caught became a reality.

“What the fuck?” Frenz, the man with the Camera standing next to McCloud, said. His eyes wide, his arm fell to the side for a moment as he moved a step closer to get a better look. McCloud hit him and ordered him to get it all on film. The camera man on the other side, Billy King, called out that he got it all. Missed nothing. Shaw’s heart sank, everything he had feared had just come true. He was found out. It was all over.

As the three men closed in on him from either side, moving cautiously, almost as if they were as afraid of him as he was of them, Shaw hurried to his feet. Pulling his hood up and over his head to get out of sight. It was too little too late as McCloud swung his fist, landing the hit on Shaw’s jaw and knocking him backwards into the shelves. The shelves gave way under his weight. With a loud bang everything fell to the floor, some cans even bursting open and landing all over Shaw.

“It’s his sweater!” Billy said, McCloud just nodded as he pulled it off of a struggling Shaw.

“Stop!” He cried out, only to have McCloud hit him again. Shaw could taste the blood as his head was rocked back. The world didn’t go black for him, but it dimmed and lost focus for a few seconds as he heard the three friends run off with their new prize. His beloved sweater. The source of his new found power. The only thing that made him special, the only thing that made him useful to his friends.

If that was the only setback he faced in that moment, it would have been enough. After all, it was a giant loss, but alas, life is never that fair and when it rains, it tends to pour. Before Shaw could even think about getting back to his feet, hell, before the world even came back into focus, people from all over the store rushed to see what all the commotion was. There was yelling and panic, all in a language that was completely foreign to Shaw. He had no idea what was being said, only that when the store manager showed up and started yelling, it wasn’t going to go well for him.

**Chapter Four**

The warm water wasn’t near as relaxing as Draco had hoped, as he splashes the water on his face. He was locked in the restroom, a stressed-out Cordelia in the other room. Part of him felt bad for how he reacted to her saving him. He had done his best to conceal just how inadequate he felt, not just in that moment, but overall, but no matter how hard he tried, his friends could see something was wrong. It wasn’t their fault, he wasn’t upset at them, he wasn’t even jealous of them. Not really. He was more just disappointed in himself. He felt like he was letting everyone else down and maybe he was. Everyone else’s powers were coming in handy. Everyone else was contributing to their situation, all he was doing was taking up space. It was a position that he had never been in before. Draco was never one to sit idly by and let others decide his fate. He was a man of action, or at least he was.

He took a nice long look at himself in the mirror, not recognizing the man who looked back. He was never the one for self-pity. It was a useless exercise that did nothing but drain those around you. It was toxic, he knew it, but couldn’t stop the feeling from creeping into his every waking moment. Once more he pulled the pocket watch out of his coat and attempted to make it work, once more nothing changed. The water, which he had left running, still ran the same. It didn’t slow down. He waved his hand before the mirror, it moved no faster than to be expected. Once more he was left with the nagging feeling that something inside him was broken. If it wasn’t for the fact that he had used his powers once, thus proving he had them, he would just write it off that what happened to the others didn’t happen to him. That he could live with. Knowing he had abilities, abilities that could potentially help his friends, and not being able to figure them out, that he couldn’t live with. There was also the fact that Leo knew what his powers were and how he could access them, but refused to tell him. He said it was something the Draco had to figure out on his own. He would be lying if he said that didn’t piss him off. To be so close to the answer, but to have it withheld for his own good. It was enough to make you scream.

Which was not a reaction that Draco would give into. No, he was the strong silent type. It was an image that he had crafted for himself over the years. One that he guarded vehemently. He wasn’t about to let anyone see just how insecure he was. Least of all, Cordelia. He cared far too much about her to let them happen. A fact that he was more worried than ever that Leo would find out. He had the power to see the truth of things, whatever that meant. How much truth? What qualified as the truth? It was so vague that thinking about it only served to frustrate Draco even more. How much of his life, his hidden self, was now on display? It wasn’t a feeling that he cared for. That wasn’t to say he didn’t trust Leo. He did. They had been best friends forever, but there was a part of himself that he liked to keep private. Having that ripped away from him, was not a fun thought.

“You okay in there?” Cordelia called out, not for the first time. With a heavy heart, Draco did his best to put a smile on his face. He was going to do his best to act happy, to act like the old Draco. The Draco that he put on for the outside world. He wasn’t going to let his own self-doubts bring anyone else down. He always prided himself on lifting others up, it was time he got back to that. No matter the cost to himself.

“I’m great!” He said, opening the door. “Those guys just got the best of me. Not going to lie, it fucking hurt.” He said with a laugh as he took a seat on the bed. “Glad I had you around to get me out of trouble.” He added with a wink.

“You know I would never allow anything to happen to you.” She said sitting down next to him. Her smile was so inviting. He hated how attracted to her he was. How his heart raced whenever she got close to him. She was his best friends’ little sister; nothing could ever happen between them. They both knew that.

“I know. I don’t know what I was thinking, just rushing those guys like that.”

“You saw someone in trouble, you stepped up.” She answered, taking hold of his hand. “It was heroic.”

“Says the woman who saved the day.” He said, locking eyes with her. He couldn’t help but feel a sense of awe at how well she handed everything. She used her powers and saved the day. She was a hero, like right out of a comic book. When he stopped feeling sorry for himself and thought about it, really thought about it. It was damned impressive. Heroic even.

“I didn’t.” She said, looking away, pulling her hand away at the same time. “I froze. I don’t think I had ever been so scared. It wasn’t until I saw you hurt that I did something. If you weren’t there. . .” she trailed off. He reached out and gently guided her face back towards his.

“You saved the day.” He said as kindly as he could. “It doesn’t matter if you froze. It doesn’t matter if you were scared. None of that matters. What matters, is that when the time came, you stepped up. You rushed in, saving not just me, but that poor woman. You’re a hero Cordelia. Don’t downplay that.”

The two of them sat there in silence for what felt like eternity, their eyes locked onto one another, little knowing that the other was thinking the same thing they were. How much they each longed for the other. In reality, it was only a few moments. Draco pulled away, the hardest action he had ever done in his life, and looked around the room, getting to his feet as he asked the question that truthfully, neither one of them cared about. At least not at the moment.

“Where’s Shaw? He should have been back by now.”

The answer to that question was a tiny holding cell in the back of the local jail. With everyone in the store watching him, and the manager screaming at him, Shaw had gotten to his feet and attempted to run. Only to be tackled to the ground by an over zealous employee. They held him, against his will, until the police came and took him away. Not before attempting to ask him questions. Questions he couldn’t understand.

They arrived at the station and he finally found some people who spoke English. For a moment, only a moment, he thought this was a lucky break. That happy thought didn’t last long. He tried to explain that he was shopping when three men with camera’s jumped him and stole his sweater. They accused him of vandalism and attempted theft. He swore his wallet, with his cash, was stolen as well. It was a lie, but the only one he could think of that would protect him.

The police had reports of three men running out of the store, but no witnesses to this alleged attack. Shaw couldn’t help but feel deflated. More so when they demanded his name so they could run him through their system, to see if he was wanted anywhere else. He didn’t know what to do. Draco had already shown them wanted posters with their names on it. He had to get out of here and quickly, or else face Dr. Geller’s wrath. In the end he told them his name was Douglas Adams, a name he stole from the author of a Hitchhiker’s guide to the galaxy. His favorite book. The police accepted the lie, put him in the cell and went off to look him up.

Shaw had no idea what was going to happen when they came back. No idea if his lie would hold up. He hoped it was a common enough name that they wouldn’t spot the lie right away, but there was also the added problem of the wanted posters. If they glanced at one, they would spot his face. They would figure out who he was on the spot and there would be no way out once that happened. As it was, he was screwed. His friends had no idea where he was, if they would even care. He felt trapped, scared and just a bit doomed.

The day passed with pleasant conversation, both Draco and Cordelia did their best to avoid mentioning, or even acknowledging their almost kiss. It was as if it never happened. A fact that panged both of them with a sense of regret that they would never admit. They waited and waited for Shaw or Leo to return, but neither ever did. As day turned to night, they went from worrying to being a bit annoyed. This wasn’t the first time that Leo had stayed at whatever car lot he had found to keep working on fixing up an old junker well into the night. It was Shaw not being around that both worried and annoyed them. He was supposed to bring the food, yet there was nothing in the motel room. The best they could figure, he went in search of a computer. For once in his life, he was putting the others first, at least that was how Cordelia saw it. Draco figured Shaw had gone for a walk to clear his head. After all, that was what Draco wanted to do, he just couldn’t leave Cordelia alone. It would undo the work he had put in to make her feel like he was happy. He didn’t want the others to know about the deep sense of self-pity that had become his default setting.

As the evening grew later, the two friends got ready for bed, a sense of dread hanging in the air. Even if Shaw had gone to find a computer, he should have been back by now. They agreed that if he wasn’t back by morning, they would go off in search of him. First finding Leo to let him know. Cordelia seemed to fall asleep in moments on her bed, while Draco leaned against the wall for what felt like hours. At last, when he was sure that she was really asleep, he got to his feet and silently left the motel room.

He walked around the motel, enjoying the fresh air, attempting to clear his head from all the negative thoughts that seemed to have taken root the past few days. He had always been a fairly confident guy; he couldn’t let one set back take that away from him. He needed to get it together and put everything into perspective. It wasn’t easy, but it’s what he needed to do.

The cool night breeze helped with that, not all the way, but enough that he was starting to be able to put things into perspective. This was just a setback, not the end of the world. He could recover from this. It was nothing more than a challenge, a puzzle, to be figured out. He was good with puzzles. He used to work on them all the time with his grandfather, this was just the newest one to conquer. He could feel his spirits start to lift, it was a good feeling, it was what he needed most. Maybe that is why he was so preoccupied that he didn’t hear the footsteps behind him, or have any warning of the crowbar that slammed into the back of his head. The sleep that he had been craving, but had been deprived from him, was his at last, though not in the form he would have preferred.

**Chapter Five**

The old beetle hummed to life as Leo attempted to turn it on. It wasn’t the best choice for him to steal, seeing as it would be sure to stand out on the road, but he couldn’t help it. The car reminded him of his father. Every picture he has of his father from when he was a kid, had this car in the background. Not this car exactly, not even the same color. This one was a horrible shade of lime green, whereas his dad’s, or really his grandfather’s, had been a bright yellow, but still, it was the same type of car. It triggered those memories in him and let him feel as if he was connected with his father in a way he hadn’t in a long time. It was a nice feeling, one he hoped that Cordelia would share when she saw the car.

His attraction to the car was so much, that he ignored the warning, his glasses told him clearly, that getting this car would prove trouble for him. He wrote it off, believing that whatever was the consequence, he could handle. After all, he had always been resourceful, always been able to think his way out of problems, and now with his glasses, with all the information and insight that they provide for him, he was more sure than ever that he could do anything. Even defeat Dr. Geller and get his friends cleared and home.

Which is why, when he heard a tapping on the passenger side window his heart damn near popped out of his chest. Slowly he turned to find standing there, Adnan Acar. He was the owner of this car lot. He inherited it from his father, after his death a few years back. He wasn’t a happy man, yet, as he stood there, his eyes locked onto Leo, he seemed positively glowing. Part of Leo wanted to just drive off, but that wouldn’t end well. It would just mark the car as stolen all the sooner, and put the police on their tail a hell of a lot quicker.

Slowly, he rolled down the window, bracing himself for whatever was about to happen. His gift had already given him the insight that Adnan had something up his sleeve. He had Leo dead to rights and he knew it. He could feel his own heart racing as he tried to think of a way out, but his gift gave him no answer. For the first time in a while, he felt truly powerless.

“Evening.” Adnan said, he was speaking English, his accent was strong. Leo didn’t need his powers to know that he was in danger. Instead of replying, he just nodded. “I have to admit stranger, I’m a bit impressed you got this old girl running. I had all but given up hope.”

“Wasn’t easy.” Leo said, attempting to figure out an escape.

“No, can’t imagine it was.” Adnan said. “Have to admit, American?” he asked, as if the question had just come to him. Leo confirmed his guest. It was pointless to lie, Adnan knew more about Leo than he was letting on. “Well, have to admit, it was exceedingly nice of you to break in, just to fix one of my cars for me.”

Leo could see that he was being walked into a trap. He hadn’t yet figured out what that trap was, but he knew it was coming. Leo slowly got out of the car, he figured that if he wasn’t confined to the car, he would have a bigger chance of escaping.

“I aim to please.” Leo said, keeping his voice low. He didn’t want to provoke him any. Without warning, two men grabbed him from behind. He attempted to break free, but they were bigger than he was. He attempted to turn to see his captors, but they forcibly turned his head back towards Adnan. The force of it knocked his glasses off. Not only depriving him of his eye sight, but also of his gift. He was helpless before Adnan now.

“Hope you weren’t planning to run off Leo Cox.” Adnan said. “That’s right, I know who you are. I read the paper.”

“What do you want?” Leo demanded, doing his best to sound in control, but hearing his voice shaking.

“Nothing. You’ve already done me a great favor.” Adnan said. Leo could make out that he was waving his hand towards the still running beetle. “What else could I ask for?” He then looks around the lot. “Unless, maybe, I don’t know. You finish the favor.” It wasn’t a question.

“Finish the favor?” Leo asked, he knew he was being tasked with something impossible, he just wasn’t sure what yet.

“There are a lot of cars on my lot that need some work done. You finish the work, I let you go. You fail me and, well, that reward money seems like it might come in handy.”

“You can’t be serious” Leo demanded.

“I am. Boys, why don’t you take him to the office. Give him some time to think it over.” Adnan said, as the two men started carrying him off to the office. “And make sure that you take the phone out of the room. Last thing we need is him calling for his friends.”

Leo felt all hope was lost. He was going to be locked away and forced to work. Not that a lot of work was going to get done without his glasses. Even if he didn’t need them to see. He had no idea how to fix cars, the glasses knew everything. He was doomed.

“Oh, and don’t forget his glasses, he might need them.”

“I can’t believe it works!” Billy said as McCloud took the hood off and reappeared in the room in front of him. Frenz took a hit off his joint, his eyes wide. Clearly freaked out by what they were witnessing.

“That’s some devil shit.” Frenz said, he reached out and touched McCloud, as if to see if he was real.

“Stop it.” McCloud snapped.

“How the fuck does it work?” Frenz asked.

“Ain’t that the million-dollar question.” Billy said.

“Don’t know, don’t care. All I know, is this is going to change everything.” McCloud said, grinning from ear to ear.

“Just think of all the badass videos we can make? We can take the pranks to the next level!” Frenz said. You could see all the ideas running through his head. He was already planning their new videos.

“Like what?” Billy demanded. “People have been doing invisible tricks on film since the 30’s. It ain’t shit. No one’s going to believe that it’s real.”

“They might.” Frenz said, defensively.

“You boys are thinking too small.” McCloud said, pulling the hood back up and turning invisible once more. “We’re going to be rich!”

The morning sun started to come through the blinds, waking Cordelia from her slumber. She had slept better than she thought. She had been worried that she would have tossed and turned all night, her thoughts playing out the worst scenarios, yet the second her head hit the pillow she was out cold.

“Morning.” She said, not too loud, she wasn’t sure if Draco was awake yet or not. When he didn’t reply, she got out of bed, glancing over at the other bed to see if Shaw had shown up in the night. The bed hadn’t been slept in, answering that question. She made her way to the restroom and got ready for her day. They had a lot to do. They couldn’t let Shaw stay lost. No matter how much he got on her nerves. She took a quick shower and was expecting the Draco would be up by time she got out.

She opened the bathroom door and noticed that the room was still empty, she couldn’t believe he was still asleep. If they wanted to find Shaw before he got in real trouble, they had to head out soon. That meant she had to wake him up. Her heart fell when she found his makeshift bed empty. She made her way outside, looking for any sign of Draco. She saw none. He was nowhere to be found. She was all alone.

The thought filled her with dread. She had no idea what she was supposed to do. She wasn’t good under pressure. Never had a chance to learn that skill. Leo always stepped in and took care of things. He felt that was his role ever since their father had died. He would know what to do now. Her big brother always came through. She just had to find him.

All thoughts of finding her brother were driven out of her head when she heard people talking right outside the door. She couldn’t understand what they were saying, but she got the gist. This was their room, they were coming in. She only had moments to figure out what to do, she scanned the room for anything of importance, finding nothing that warranted getting caught for, she ran to the restroom. Unfortunately, there was no back window, she would have to make one. She went into the bathroom, locking the door, and made her way to the back wall. Taking a deep breath, she rammed her shoulder into the back wall, breaking through it. Almost falling through, it. She let out a startled cry, she had forgotten that she was on the second story.

The man was now outside the bathroom door yelling at her, the woman screaming. She was found out; she had no choice but to jump. So, jump she did. She wasn’t sure what she was expecting, but the jump didn’t even faze her. She landed on her feet, cracking the cement, and took off running. She now not only had to find her friends, but find them before they tried to make their way back to the room. Shit had just gotten dangerous. She knew deep down that nothing was ever going to be the same.

To Be Continued