1. OPENING PAGE OF *SPARKED*

The knocking woke me up from a dead sleep.

*Whack, whack.*

I sat up, blinking myself awake. The sky outside our porthole-shaped window was still dark, the silhouettes of the redwoods just a shade blacker. Rain lashed at the glass. Wind rocked the Airstream back and forth.

*Whack.*

There was that knocking again. I leaned over to wake Ivy. Our beds were so close, they practically touched—

But Ivy wasn’t in her bed.

*Whack, whack.*

She must have snuck out and forgotten her key. I needed to let her in fast. Our mom was a heavy sleeper—especially if she’d smoked a “medicinal” joint before bed—but there was a limit to what she could tune out.

When I eased open the accordion door to the bedroomette, a river of cold air whooshed over me. I hurried to the front of the trailer, where the door was wide open, banging in the wind.

I stepped out onto the top cinder-block stair, straining to see through the rain. “Ivy?” I called into the darkness, but no one answered. The icy wind cut through my pajamas and I shuddered, wrapping my arms around myself. Ivy must have left the door unlocked, and thestorm had blown it open.

Still, it creeped me out.

I wasn’t used to living in a tin can on the edge of civilization. Our new property bumped up against the state park. We had no neighbors for miles, but hikers, poachers, and the occasional homeless person liked to use our land as their playground. Mom said that we were safer out here than if we lived in some apartment in town. Statistically, there were fewer weirdos in the vicinity.

*But all it takes is one.*

1. EXCERPT FROM CHAPTER 2: ENGLISH CLASS HUMILIATION AND FIRE SCENE

(400 WORDS)

*When the novel opens, Laurel wakes up to find her sister Ivy missing from her bed. Their mom is sure that she must have stayed out all night to try to teach her a lesson—because of a fight they had the night before—and that Laurel will see her at school. When Ivy isn’t there, Laurel becomes increasingly convinced that something terrible must have happened to her. Not knowing what else to do, she goes to class. In first period, her English teacher returns a short story that she’d submitted the week before. Laurel has always considered herself a writer, and English has always been her best subject in school, so the following exchange comes as a blow on what’s already a horrible day…*

“This was a clever idea,” Ms. Owen said, “but the characters never really came to life.” She dropped the story I’d submitted for a creative assignment on my desk. My words were covered in so much red ink, I could barely read them anymore.

“I mean who is this girl *really*?” she said. “What does she see in this boy, aside from the ‘sparkle of his ultraviolet eyes’?” She put those words in finger quotes. I shrugged, my face burning. “And what about him?” she pressed. “If everything he touches turns to stone, how does he eat?”

*Ouch.*

“I don’t know,” I mumbled. “It’s just, like, a fantasy story.”

“Well, I think you can do better,” she said sternly.

My eyes prickled with tears. I hoped she’d go away—but Ms. Owen was like a pit bull, jaws locked on its prey.

“If you’re serious about becoming a writer, I suggest you spend more time thinking about what makes people tick,” she said. “Use your real-life observations to create fictional characters with a pulse.”

My vision filmed over and I tried not to blink. Normally, I wouldn’t have broken down like this over a stupid story, but I didn’t know how much more I could take today.

Everyone was staring at me.

Except for Jasper.

He seemed to be gazing at some point at the front of the classroom, oddly focused, although there was nothing in particular to see there.

Then I smelled it: very faint at first, but unmistakable.

Burning.

Behind Ms. Owen, a curlicue of smoke rose from the garbage can. Something crackled quietly, like a twig snapping in the woods. Then a flame shot up over the rim. Half the class screamed, not so much in fear as in delight that something was happening for a change. As the flame whooshed up, Ms. Owen scuttled backward, as if hoping to use the students in the front row as a buffer between herself and the fire.

People leaped to their feet. Stu Sheers smashed the glass on the fire alarm, and the air filled with the pealing of the bell. Everyone rushed out the door, pushing and shoving. Ms. Owen yelled at us to hurry, and I grabbed my backpack. Only Jasper didn’t move. When I left the room, he was still pinned in his chair, staring at that blaze as if he didn’t want to get an inch closer to it.

1. EXCERPT FROM CHAPTER 3: FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH THE MEAN GIRLS

*When the novel opens, Laurel wakes up to find her sister Ivy missing from her bed. Their mom is sure that she must have stayed out all night to try to teach her a lesson—because of a fight they had the night before—and that Laurel will see her at school. When Ivy isn’t there, Laurel becomes increasingly convinced that something terrible must have happened to her. At lunch, she isn’t sure who to sit with, because usually she eats with Ivy. Trying to avoid Peyton and Mei, two “mean girls” who’ve bullied her since grade school, she goes to the library, to see if Ivy has left any social media posts. But unfortunately, while she’s there, she gets cornered by the two girls she’d hoped to avoid.*

The bell rang and I ducked out of my study pod, hoping I could slip past without them noticing. But no such luck. As I barreled toward the library exit, Peyton stepped directly in front of me. “Laurel! Ooh, I love your outfit. And what is that—yogurt?” She pointed at a smear on my sweater. “It adds a nice splash of beige.” When I didn’t answer, she shook her head at me disapprovingly. “How is it even possible that you’re Ivy’s sister?”

I opened my mouth, but as usual a snappy comeback failed me. This was one reason I liked writing: it gave me time to find the perfect words.

Mei took over the attack. “Where *do* youget your style inspiration—Mrs. Bennett? Since she’s, like, your best friend, do you get to raid her closet?”

Peyton squinted at me. “That sweater actually does look familiar. Wait—was that my mom’s? No, seriously—she always gives stuff she’s throwing out to the maid! She must have given it to your mom before she fired her!”

Suddenly it felt like my skin was crawling with fire ants. The worst part was, Peyton wasn’t imaginative enough to make this up. Mom did used to clean the Andersen house, and I *had* taken this particular sweater from her closet. I’d just assumed Mom had scored it at the Goodwill. I was dying to rip it off and throw it in the trash, but I couldn’t give Peyton the satisfaction of seeing how much she’d bothered me.

All I could do was march out of the library to the soundtrack of their laughter.

1. EXCERPT FROM CHAPTER 7: IVY’S DREAM

*When the novel opens, Laurel wakes up to find her sister Ivy missing from her bed. Beginning that night, Laurel starts having nightmares that she is Ivy, chained up in a dungeon, being held captive by a man in a ski mask. Here is a scene from one of her first dreams…*

Something drops into the cell and I jump. But it’s just a roll of toilet paper, still in its paper wrapper, decorated with dancing teddy bears. The expensive kind we never buy. It rolls to the far corner of the cell, out of reach.

I rake my fingernails against my wrist, desperate for relief.

I remember the first time the itch flared up. I was at that stupid camp, and I became convinced that I’d been bitten by something venomous—a scorpion or a snake—something way bigger than a mosquito. The itch seemed to be concentrated in the star-shaped birthmark on my wrist. The more I scratched, the worse that spot throbbed, until I started to worry that I was going to dig a hole in my skin. I used it as an excuse to hide out in the cabin. I was alone, trying not to scratch myself bloody as I stared at my sewing machine, wondering why I’d lugged it all the way there, when I realized that the needle was moving up and down, lifting and lowering the thread in perfect stitches through the fabric of the dress I was dying to finish.

There wasn’t even electricity in our cabin.

“One more minute,” he calls from above.

I catch sight of that roll of toilet paper in the far corner. I shouldn’t even be thinking about doing this. I hate this freaky power. But I hate this crazy itchy feeling even more.

I take a few jagged breaths, trying to clear my mind, and then I flex my eyes. Everything else fades, until the toilet paper seems to be illuminated by a spotlight that’s glowing from inside me somehow. Then it starts to roll. Very slowly at first, and then faster and faster, all the way across the floor and into my waiting hand.

Thunk. Thunk.

He’s coming back. For one sweet moment, I’d managed to forget about him.

I drop the toilet paper. The itch is gone, but so is the adrenaline. As the power drains out of me, it takes every ounce of strength just to stay on my feet.

1. EXCERPT FROM CHAPTER 13

*This chapter takes us into the point of view of Peyton Andersen, a huge gossip, and one of the “mean girls” who’ve bullied Laurel since grade school. She’s the daughter of a powerful pastor, who isn’t particularly loving towards her. Things are especially bad lately, as she recently lied to him and went to a party where she got drunk. In this scene, which takes place not long after that party, at one of her church youth group meetings, she starts hearing whispers coming from the room—although no one’s lips are moving. The gossip in her seizes the chance to get the dirt on a prissy girl her father idolizes, hoping to bring her down a notch…*

*I wish I’d waited.*

At first Peyton couldn’t tell where this whisper was coming from. She scanned the refreshments table, where Hanna was arranging her M&M’s cookies on a platter.

*Why did I listen when Remy said that he loved me?*

Was that Hanna? It sounded like her voice, whispering. But her thin lips hadn’t moved that Peyton could see, and no one else seemed to have heard a thing.

*I was so stupid to let him pressure me. He hasn’t even texted in weeks.*

Yep. That was Hanna, no question. And Remy was the name of their camp counselor. He was cute but borderline pervy, always giving the girls back rubs, letting his fingers wander and linger. In fact, he was the same counselor that Peyton had claimed to have lost her virginity to. She was sick to death of being the pastor’s daughter—no guy dared to touch her with a ten-foot pole, lest her father bring the brimstone of his sermons to bear on them. When she’d spread the rumor about how willing she was to give it up to Remy, she’d hoped a few guys would be enticed enough to forget who her father was. But so far there were no takers. She still couldn’t believe the way Jasper had brushed her off. She scratched at her birthmark, but this only made it itchier.

*It seemed so real at the time, but obviously I meant nothing to him.*

That squeaky whisper again! Had Hanna—the blessed virgin—actually done what Peyton had only pretended to? No. Way. Besides, she was standing by herself.

*How did that guy get in my bed on Friday night? Where the hell did Mei go?*

This deeper whisper came from her left, where Stu was standing with his shoulders hunched up by his ears like he was trying to simulate his football padding.

The room spun as Peyton clenched her fists and squeezed her eyes shut, wishing she could do the same to her ears. Schizophrenics heard voices. Wasn’t this the first sign of a mental breakdown? She dashed to the bathroom, locking the door and peering at herself in the mirror. Her cheek was covered with claw marks, cross-hatching her birthmark—it was horrifying. She wished she’d listened to her mother for once and brought her concealer with her. She looked like a crazy person.