

The Incandescent Spark

Chapter 1

My name is Isabelle, but in the mental hospital, they called me “Dizzy Izzy”. I’m an unemployed high school dropout from Grand Rapids, Michigan. And I can’t seem to find my spark. I misplaced it, or perhaps I unknowingly murdered it. Maybe it took a train and left me and my big fat ass behind. Right now, I’m just sitting in my room, writing this, scratching my metaphorical balls, wondering to myself: where the hell is it?

It used to be fused to me, like superglue. It was a

romance of sorts, my spark and I against the world. And this search I have in front of me for my lustrous spark, is making me nauseous. You could even say it's making me dizzy.

Suppose I had to pinpoint what really ignited my spark in the past? It would be music. Making it, inhabiting it, letting it spill across my skin like warm water. I tasted every note and nuance as though it were a rich, savory steak (even though I'm vegan). Which I felt compelled to mention immediately because I'm a self-righteous egomaniac.

Nothing comes close to the rush of music. Of learning a new song and finally getting it right, feeling every note vibrate through my heart. Music has always been my greatest friend. I didn't have many, because I had been very quiet in school. But during recess, I could always hum my little songs

and bop along to my own rhythm.

I have been singing in the back of my grandma's car for as long as I can remember. Letting the world pass by outside the windows, while I poured myself into every melody. I started taking guitar lessons when I was 11 and began writing songs at 12. By 13, I had created my first EP, six original songs all about nature. At fifteen, I made a full album. 11 songs that captured my emotions toward who I was becoming. I even won first place at a local talent competition. Music is like a window into the deep recesses of my mind. It used to be my passion, my joy, and my inspiration.

Most of all, though, music was a way for me to connect with people. Both on a stage, with a crowd full of people, or in a private music lesson. I was able to speak the deep truths of my heart with absolutely no judgment.

But growing inside of me, there was a feeling I couldn't shake. I could play music till my fingers blistered, or scroll Instagram until my eyes were sore. But nothing seemed to quiet the undesirable sensations that come with being a human being. Memories, questions, depression, anger. These undesirables were creeping into every facet of my life.

Just like everything else, music had become a chore, just something I did because I felt like I had to. So, I stopped going to music lessons. I stopped playing songs altogether. And I couldn't pick up the guitar without crying.

Without my spark to guide me, music felt empty. Like I was solely going through the motions. I didn't feel the spiritual depths of a song because I didn't want to face the spiritual depths of my soul.

Without music, I felt so alone. All the time. And the few friends I do have don't speak English. Mostly because they're: cats and dogs and pretty much anything that sheds on my clothes.

But there is Ella. Our mothers were inseparable, so basically, Ella was my built-in best friend. We grew up together, which means she's seen the best and worst of me, often in the same afternoon.

We were in her living room, drawing. I remember reaching over, wrapping my hands around her neck, and

shaking her the way Homer shakes Bart in *The Simpsons*.

She bursted into tears immediately. I felt awful for making her cry. Her mom rushed in, horrified.

“Isabelle! That’s it! No more Simpsons!” my mom yelled, waving a finger in the air.

I loved Ella with an innocent, bone-deep loyalty. But if I wanted to play princesses and she wanted to play doctor, she’d threaten to stop being my friend. However, by the time playtime was over, we had re-enacted a realistic birth to triplets or something else dramatic and gory. So the negotiation phase didn’t matter too much.

She lived an hour and a half away. And as a child, it felt like she was planets away. And over time, she poured

herself into school and sports and caring about the world, while I... didn't. Still, she is someone I would die for. Or be a surrogate for. Or display some other grandiose gesture of life and death for.

We used to sing "Grenade" by Bruno Mars like a blood oath.

"I would catch a grenade for you in real life, Ella," I once told her, tugging at my wedgie.

"That means you would explode," she replied, grinning over her chocolate milk.

"I would explode for you, too."

"Yes," I said.

"If I had to choose who to die, me or you. I would choose me." We nodded together, solemn as a pair of tiny generals.

That was Ella, my ride or die.

My niece Journee might be my best friend of all. I was thirteen when she was born 5 years ago. I love playing with her, showing her new things, and teaching her about the world.

Now Journee is a big sister. Kanan is all chubby cheeks and grabby hands. She'll stare at me with this wide-eyed curiosity. Like she's trying to download the secrets of the universe through my face. I am aware she likely wants a snack, but it still makes me feel important. We all spin and dance around the living room together until we're sweaty and dizzy. Those two girls have me wrapped around their sticky fingers.

Sky is a friend from my childhood, my little cousin.

He remains one of the funniest people I've ever known.

Endless fart jokes and absurd conversations punctuate my memories of him.

The summer he came with us to Florida, the air was heavy with salt and sunscreen, and my life quietly shifted. He was fifteen, I was seventeen, and I had learned he had become a “baby stoner.” At first, disappointment crept in. Then I saw my opening.

“Hey, Sky!” I tossed a pillow at him. He looked up from his phone.

“What?” he shouted in mock irritation.

“Can you drink bong water? Would that make you high?”

“No,” he laughed.

“It would be a sweet little treat.” We laughed. Then I leaned

in.

“Well... do you have any bong water?”

“Not with me. But I have a weed pen.”

“What’s that?” He explained what La Penjamin was.

“If you don’t let me try that, I’m telling my dad you brought it,” I stated, putting a serious look on my face.

“Y-you can try it,” he said, handing me a sleek metallic pen.

The first inhale told me everything; I was going to have a problem.

And for six months, weed had delicately threaded itself into every dimension of my daily life: edibles, carts, bong rips, joints. And trust me, I savored every stitch.

I turned on my favorite song and sank into every instrument, completely loosening the reins on my breath and

body.

The only problem was the feeling that came when I stopped. Without it, I was rigid, restless. Anxious.

I put my laundry in the washer. My heart started racing. My breath became shallow. I felt like I was going to hurl. At this point, I couldn't stand my sober mind or body. I didn't want to become a stagnant stoner, but I couldn't stop smoking.

I would get very angry, too, when I stopped smoking. When I got too angry, I searched for a release anywhere I could find it. And I hurt myself in the process in more ways than one.

Chapter 2

At the same time, my parents were away on vacation, I started using weed more and more frequently. I felt happier than I ever had. I took a shower every day, wrote new songs, went on walks, hung out with friends, and even did daily yoga. I had finally found my spark! Or so I thought.

I felt great, but when my parents got home, I had to cut back on weed. My body revolted. My stomach hurt so bad, and all I could do was lie down in absolute agony and nibble saltines. It was a harsh reminder that my mind and

body are fragile. That the highs could flip into lows faster than I wanted to admit. Weed was kind of like a spark, except instead of lighting up my smile, it burned me from the inside out.

Chapter 3

Eventually, things seemed to be going fine. But I still didn't feel like myself. I had forgotten what it felt like to have a sparkle. To feel that rush of joy in my heartspace.

One October afternoon, while rubbing rocks together trying to find a spark, I started a wildfire.

I was 17, and my sister Kimberly baked edible brownies for Sky and me. She also gifted me a Hello Kitty bong. We went outside to break it in, and my singer's lungs pulled more than my share. We passed La Penjamin between hits. It was more weed than I'd ever done in my life.

After everyone left, I lied down to sleep. And for some reason, I started sobbing uncontrollably. Something about this high was not going well.

After an hour of crying, my stomach lurched. I stumbled to the bathroom and vomited. Tears blurred my vision. The truth tightened around my chest like a snug bra; I'm pregnant. I had not had a period since my first sexual encounter months earlier.

Guilt rose in my throat thicker than the bile. If I were

pregnant, I would have poisoned the baby with weed and starved it with my strict diet. I lost sixty pounds in a few months. No way that was safe for baby. If I had any clue I was pregnant, I would have taken good care of my body. My periods are usually inconsistent, so that didn't alarm me. And I used protection, but things slipped up if that makes sense. I'm not a bad person. I just didn't know I was pregnant.

I remember my dad brought up my weight loss at a doctor's appointment. I'm sitting in the doctor's office. My leg bounced, and the paper sheet on the exam chair crinkled every time I shifted. The doctor looked at me and asked, "You don't want to vanish into nothing, do you?" "No, no, nothing like that," I said, my voice steady even as a

lump in my throat appeared. It was, in fact, the most perfect description of how I felt. I wanted nothing more than to dissolve. To become so small, so weightless, that the wind could carry me away like an inconsequential scrap of paper. No one would notice that it was missing. And that's the feeling I felt when it occurred to me that I might be pregnant.

Whether I was pregnant or not, one thing was true: I needed my mommy. I went to my mom's room, sobbing. Sitting at the edge of her bed, I shook her awake. "Come here, and snuggle," she murmured, half-asleep. I crawled next to her, clinging to her warmth like it could stop the panic.

Not long after, her alarm began. She had an

appointment.

“Can I come with you?” I asked, my voice still raw.

“Sure,” she said, already on her feet. I waited in the car, buzzing with fear and adrenaline. After her appointment, the car ride back is silent.

We're sitting in the car parked in our driveway,

“What does it mean to miss a period?”

“It means you go a month without your period.”

“How many periods can you miss without worrying about it?”

“Why, whose pregnant?” She looked at me intensely.

“Ella, but don't tell anyone I told you.” She looked at me in disbelief. Not like she was shocked, like she didn't believe me.

Like she knew I was lying. Tears welled in my eyes.

After I mustered the courage to ask for a pregnancy test, my mother and I sat on my bed waiting. She was understanding, scared, and comforting, and all the things a good mom would be in this situation

“I got pee everywhere, Mom,” I confess, tucking my hair behind my ear.

“It’s okay.” She said, laughing a little,

“It should be ready. Do you want me to be here with you while you read it?”

“Yes.”

Flashes of dirty diapers and financial ruin pounded through my head. A nightmare come to life. I saw endless sleepless nights and bills piling up, every worry crashing over

me like a wave I couldn't outswim. But beneath the fear, a strange, nurturing feeling crept in. I could be a good mother after all. Maybe.

My room felt cold and silent except for the steady tick of the clock. My bare feet sank into the fluffy carpet, and my hands shook as I reached for the test sitting on my bookshelf. For a long moment, I stared at it.

Then I turned it over.

One pink line.

Negative. Not pregnant.

I felt nothing. Not happiness, not grief. Just nothing.
Then... relief slammed into me so hard I sank to the floor. I
had been holding my muscles tight without knowing it.
Now I could finally breathe again.

Chapter 4

After the test, I spent countless hours on the couch with my mom. I spilled my guts about everything, how I'd been smoking weed several times a day every day for six months, how it wasn't about the high anymore. It was the quietness in my mind. I confessed how the anxiety stuck to me like gum to my shoe. How the sadness wasn't going anywhere, no matter how hard I tried to distract myself. How I'd truly and entirely lost my spark. She wasn't angry or judgmental, but one thing she was was supportive and loving. We watched a dozen movies together, and I felt

slightly better.

But soon the sun set, and it was time to try going to sleep. I decided to snuggle with my mom in her room.

I couldn't sleep. I could. Not. Sleep. For hours, I stare at the ceiling as more and more disturbing thoughts sting my head like a headache. Weird memories and dark traumas haunt me like never before. It felt like all my worst fears were coming true. Not like spiders, ghosts, or killer clowns, like the real stuff, the secrets you keep deep inside your gut. The ones that slowly chip away at the very pinnacle of your conscious mind until you eventually axe murder someone out of sheer insanity.

The next day, I tried my hardest to chug juice and water to stay hydrated, and I nibbled on saltines, but that was

all I could stomach.

The next night, I still couldn't sleep; I was beginning to feel very sick. Each day that passed, my thoughts became more and more unorganized.

The next night, same thing. I could not get myself to sleep if my life depended on it.

I stare at the ceiling that I'd gotten familiar with for so long. But time started folding and unfolding, becoming distorted. My thoughts began racing faster. Faster. I couldn't tell if I was awake or dreaming. The walls breathe. The clock's ticking stretched and snapped. Tick, tock, tick, tock.

My thoughts doubled back on themselves, twisting words into riddles I couldn't solve. I reasoned with my parents while they tried to sleep. I kept leaping up to ask a

bizarre question or murmur complete nonsense. They began to get increasingly frustrated.

“Can you call me Izzy?” I asked intensely, pulling the covers over my head.

“No, that would be weird.” My dad frowned and closed his eyes again.

“But she needs my help!” I started crying and I couldn’t stop. Reality started to wobble. Sounds twisted into whispers and roars all at once. The line between what was real got thinner every moment. Until I realized I was standing outside my head, watching everything fall apart. I jumped out of bed and ran to my room.

I started scribbling words frantically in notebooks.

The pages were swiftly flipping on their own, as if a big gust

of wind came in. I swear, lightning struck behind me, and my pen was possessed by The Flash.

I had convinced myself I stumbled onto the cure for cancer. I could try to explain my thought process, but it would make me sound even more ridiculous than I already feel. With every line I wrote, darker memories crept in, shadows I'd buried deep in the alcoves of my brain. I felt more alone with every passing second.

Then my dad burst through the door.

“Dad, I have the cure for cancer!” I grinned and started bouncing around the room. I grabbed my notebook and flipped to the page.

“We have to go to radiology! People need to see this.” I’m too focused and manic to look at his expression.

“Okay, let’s go.”

We grabbed Mom and jumped in the car. On the way there, I couldn’t stop talking to my dad, but it was all nonsense to him. I felt high, terrified, and exhilarated all at once. I hadn’t slept in days. I was completely delirious and acting grossly out of character. I was sobbing, so angry with no release, my brain wasn’t working correctly, and that pissed me off.. I started pulling out my hair.

“Why did I do that?” I cried, clutching a clump in my hands.

“It’s going to be okay,” my dad murmured as he drove.

“What’s wrong with me? I love my hair!”

“That’s what we’re going to find out, okay?” His voice was gentle, steady.

“Do I have brain cancer?” I sobbed for the rest of the ride.

When we got to the emergency room, I waited until they called my name.

“Why are you here today?” the doctor asked kindly.

“I found the cure for cancer!” I said, excitement bubbling up again. Then my legs gave out beneath me. They turned to jelly, and I collapsed onto my butt.

“Whoa, we need a wheelchair,” someone said. I blanked out as they wheeled me through the hospital.

“Where are we going?” I asked groggily.

“The children’s hospital.”

“Why?”

“Because you’re a child.”

They put me in a big machine and told me not to move a muscle. They were checking me for brain damage. It sounded scary, but when I'm with my dad, not much can spook me. The test came back clear. No brain damage. Thank goodness.

Then a nurse came in wearing glasses, and I panicked. In my heart, I was sure my grandfather invented glasses to brainwash the population.

"I need to see your eyes," I said as I reached out to grab the nurse's glasses from her face. She glared at me.

"Let's keep our hands to ourselves."

"I'm sorry," I whispered, my voice cracking as tears spilled down.

They gave me a strong sleeping medication. But I fought it. If I fell asleep, I was sure I would die.

What's worse is that I wasn't allowed to have my phone! But they gave me a coloring sheet and some clay to keep me busy. I had so many ideas in my head that I needed to get them out.

"I need a pen!" I begged my mom.

"You're not allowed to have a pen," she said.

"They want to silence me," I muttered under my breath.

I noticed a girl sitting outside my room on a computer.

"Why is that girl watching me?" I whispered, leaning close to my mom.

"She's not. She's looking at her computer."

“I’m not stupid. I know she’s watching me through the cameras and listening to us.”

“You can see for yourself she’s checking her email.”

“Oh.”

I stayed in that room for a few days. I watched kids’ movies with my dad during meal times and held my mom’s hand when the scary stuff got too big. We played Uno, and I read chapters from a book to them. I could feel the fear radiating from my parents, and it terrified me more than anything else. They had this concerned look in their eyes that I’d never seen before. I had never seen my parents cry before, but their eyes looked puffy and strange.

One day, my dad walked in holding a pamphlet. I

don't remember exactly what he said, but it was clear I needed more help than this place could give me.

We drove to a nearby Taco Bell to meet my older sister, Kimberly. She handed me a few books, a pair of pajama pants with no strings, and a picture Journee had drawn for me. I almost cried. It felt like she'd given me a piece of home small enough to carry in my pocket.

We arrived at the sterile building. It was big and scary, and they kept telling me it was a no-touch facility. They took my bracelet and my chapstick. I hold it in my hand a second longer to read what it said, "Petro-latum... petroleum! My Chapstick is petroleum, that's from dinosaurs, right? I think as a human race, we are

addicted to fossil fuels.” I said it like I was discovering some new revolutionary idea.

“Yeah,” my dad agreed, not knowing what that had to do with my Chapstick or the situation at large.

A stack of papers waited for me, each one stamped with the words “Peaceful Meadow Mental Hospital” at the top. My parents hovered while I signed, but eventually, they left.

A nurse led me into a small, bright room for a skin check. She glanced at my wrist and read in a flat, measured tone,

“Two superficial linear scars on the left wrist.”

A friendly nurse named Amanda guided me to my room. I set my folder on the floor beside the bed and lay down on the firm mattress, no pillow, and a blanket pulled tight.

Panic shot through me.

If I fell asleep, I knew in my heart I was going to die. I leapt up. Regret hit me like a brick, so hard my teeth could have fallen out. Where are my parents? Why am I here? It was nighttime, so no one was awake.

I wandered down the main hallway until I saw two

seated men. One was an unremarkable security guard, the other a tall Black psychiatric technician in sunglasses.

Sunglasses. Indoors. At night. I leaned in way too close.

“Ray-Bans,” I said, eyes flicking to his name tag. “Sam!” He pulled back and laughed awkwardly. “Ray-Ban Sam! Your name rhymes!” Relief bloomed in my chest. This made sense.

Ray-Ban Sam.

I moved to the group room and tugged at the handle.

“Sam! A little help?” He came over, unlocking the door with his key.

Inside, the place looked like an abandoned elementary classroom. Papers everywhere, heavy chairs scattered across the room. I started dragging the chairs into new arrangements. And stacking papers in neat piles until my

bones felt heavy and liquid.

In the quiet room, I grabbed a marker and scrawled
across the whiteboard:

TO THE PEOPLE IN HERE, DREAM BIG!!!!

And then... I blacked out.

When I woke up, I was being wheeled to my room. A
nurse farts right by my face as the stench reaches my nose I
yell,

“Dirty bastard!” as I get swiftly wheeled away.

Amanda lifted me from a chair to my bed. She handed
me a glass of cold water, and I spilled it all over myself. A jolt
of energy burst through my legs from the cold.

I smiled widely,

“Your license should be revoked because you don’t know
how to take care of me.”

I pulled the thin blanket tighter around me, but it felt like the air was chewing through it. The vents hummed above my head. I kept staring at them, imagining frost curling out.

Somewhere in my mind, a thought started scratching. What if they were trying to freeze me? Not like, "it's chilly in here" freeze, but full-on science experiment freeze. I'd read about cryogenic freezing before, but I didn't think it was gonna happen to me.

I didn't want that. I didn't want to wake up in some strange, alien world. I could feel it happening, my limbs getting heavier, my breath slowing, the warmth leaving my fingers.

Were the nurses scientists? Was this even a hospital?

My heart slammed against my ribs. I told myself I was overreacting, but the cold kept creeping up my spine.

Later, I woke in dry clothes, pink pajama pants covered in tiny white polka dots. I lay there confused for a while. If I had been frozen, that means it's been years. I picked up the drawing Journee drew me and hugged it tightly. Everyone I know is dead, including my sweet nieces. My eyes turned into mini waterfalls as I looked down at the picture. I missed watching them grow up, I missed their birthday parties, graduations, and weddings. I wondered if they still thought of me toward the end of their life or if they remembered me at all.

Decades.

My parents are gone. Everyone I know is gone. My heart

begins racing, and my eyes can't stop the tears. The world must have fallen apart without me.

Somebody has to fix this.

Who else would care enough? Who else could do it correctly? My pulse thunders in my ears as the idea swells. I will have to become the president. I will have to save everyone.

A nurse started to take my vitals and handed me a pill with a paper shot glass of water.

"What is this?" I asked, staring down at it.

"Protonics," she said kindly, removing the blood pressure cuff from my arm.

"Who is the president?" She answered, and I didn't believe it.

“No, that can't be right,” I say, scratching my head in disbelief.

A flash of memory hit me, a moment like this, asking these same questions and receiving the same answers. I could not tell if it was a memory or déjà vu. The edges of the moment blurred. For a second, the past and present tangled together, leaving me suspended somewhere.

I got brown sugar oatmeal for breakfast, which I hated. I went to the med window when they called my name, “Where am I?” “Peaceful Meadow mental hospital,” the nurse replied, “Why?” “To get better,” he smiled as I downed my medicine. “What did I just take?”

My memory blacked out until lunch, when they gave me a cheese pizza. Cheese. Pizza. Cheese. I started crying. I can’t eat this. But... I have to; it must be part of getting better. I have to cleanse myself of the brainwashing of the vegan community. The girl I’m sitting next to asks if I’m okay,

“I'm vegan,” I say, stuffing more pizza down my throat.

“Nurse!” She gets her attention, and they take my pizza away.

The next thing I know, they line us all up for visitations. My parents won't be there because they're dead. I want to puke and cry out of every hole and orifice I have.

When I walk in the room, I see them! My parents! My eyes start to feel watery, and I can't wipe the smile off my face.

"You guys are alive!" I hug my mom, and her perfume fills my nostrils.

"Of course we are." My dad says happily.

"I thought you were dead!"

"No, no." My dad is wearing a vibrant, patterned shirt, and my mom is wearing a beautiful dress.

"Guys, I think I'm in here because of my phone addiction. I feel great without constantly checking my phone!"

"No, you're in here because you smoked too much weed and didn't eat or sleep for multiple days." My dad explained shifting his weight in his chair.

“Do you come every day?” I ask curiously, adjusting in my seat.

“No, we didn't come yesterday, or the day before.”

“How long have I been here?”

“Four days.” My heart sinks to my gut. Four days? I thought I had been here one day. I only remember one day here. Had I really blacked out for four days, what did I do? What did I say? Who was I during those lost days?

Chapter 5

In time, my parents decided to switch the doctor I was seeing at the hospital. The following is an email my parents sent him:

Parents:

I am Isabelle's dad, me and Isabelle's mom are writing this letter together.

On Monday (day 4 at Peaceful Meadow), we were getting very frustrated. Even now, through

this entire process, we have not received any communication from her doctor. We were very scared. On Monday, it had seemed that her condition had continually gotten worse each day.

She was on Haldol each day, and the nurses were assuring us that it was a small amount. But it seemed it was giving her an incredible amount of brain fog. Unable to concentrate on things, and even got so bad that she lost her balance. She was having problems with unusual muscle movements, speaking, and slurring her words.

We do understand that she needed Haldol to stop rapid cycling, to help her sleep, and to give

time for antipsychotics to start working. But it felt like she wasn't going in the right direction.

On Monday night, the doctor put in for her to stop Haldol and added Abilify at 5 mg. And by the time we visited on Tuesday, we saw a world of difference in her from the conversation over the phone on Monday. She was able to talk in maybe half-sentences and could recall things from pictures. She was following the schedule with the other kids to some degree throughout the day.

This was light-years of improvement from the four previous days.

Today (Wednesday), we were able to talk to her on the phone for about half an hour, and she was able to hold the conversation with a simple sentence on the different topics with each of the four of us who talked to her. And was able to initiate topics with us and answer questions much more easily.

I think that it is the process of getting the Haldol out of her system. I think her, in particular, Haldol is especially potent.

The doctor's also gone up on abilify from 5 to 7.5. I think maybe the first 7.5 dose is today.

So obviously, the only thing that we care

about is the steady improvement of Isabelle.

My biggest thing for this entire process is just getting Isabelle back to normal.

She has never had psychotic symptoms that we've known of before. She has struggled with anxiety and depression, and has maybe had some racing thoughts. But this is something that we've had no indication of before.

On the 30th of October, she woke us up at 4:00 a.m. after having been up all night and was very manic, and felt like she was coming down off a lot of weed.

For the next 3 days, we were helping her through what we believed was coming down from a

huge amount of weed. He did not have any psychotic symptoms as I can recognize, and it still seemed like she was with it and was kind of manic.

She then continually got more manic throughout the night of the 5th and got maybe 1 hour of sleep, and then was back awake. Being very manic and a little paranoid. And then she got another hour of sleep, and she jumped out of bed and began having what I now know is an extreme bout of psychosis. We rushed her to the ER, and we spent 2 days in the ER. They were not able to get her to sleep that day, but were able to get her to sleep that night with her second dose.

We then transferred to Peaceful Meadow

hospital, where they immediately started her on Ativan and Haldol, and she was able to get lots of sleep and rest, and she was started on 50 mg Seroquel.

After doing some research, talking to people, and looking at the circumstances, I believe that she has weed-induced psychosis.

We communicated this information to anyone we've been able to talk to, but I don't know what has filtered to her doctor and what his thoughts are, because we've had no communication.

To give you some background. Isabelle would always have a wide spectrum of emotions and personality. Often, she would be quiet and

reserved, especially at school or in unfamiliar situations. However, there are many times when she is excited and bubbly, and can be the star of the party when she feels comfortable with everyone.

So in the end, we just want what's best for Isabelle to get through this process and get back to normal. We are willing to do whatever we can, and we are hoping that our involvement can help Isabelle.

Thank you for taking the time to email us.

Chapter 6

All of a sudden, I woke up cold. Again. The nurse takes my vitals and gives me my medicine.

“What is this?”

“Protonics,” She smiled, and I scratched my head, confused.

“What's that?”

“It's for the acid in your stomach.”

Come lunch time, I was gaining consciousness. I had to sit in the quiet room because I was still on RTU (restricted

to unit) for writing on the whiteboard and rearranging the group room. I sat next to a girl who was also on RTU. She convinced the physc tech to get her double portions of lasagna, iconic behavior. She started to speak, “Izzy, you can not trust anyone in here. Be careful who you trust for real. These bitches will cross you.” “Noted... thanks,” I smile and we chat a while longer. Until the rest of the group comes back from lunch.

The next few days were much, much easier. I was finally starting to feel like myself again. Reality was settling into place, and it was beginning to feel like I had nothing to worry about. I was able to talk to my parents on the phone and had a coherent conversation about lobster hunting with my dad.

A girl with a dark brown messy bun walks up to me,
like the bun itself had unfinished business.

“Hey, new girl, we have one rule around here: don’t touch
each other’s shit.” My heart sinks,

“I’m sorry, I didn’t know.”

A white girl with long blonde hair comes up to me,
“It’s okay, you didn’t know.”

“My name is Isabelle!” I smile and reach out my hand for a
handshake. She has these bright blue eyes.

“My name is Bella,”

“Oh, we are almost like name twins!” she laughs and picks
up a paper from the desk behind her,

“Do you wanna see my art board?”

“Of course!” She points to various drawings and doodles in

crayon and tells me about each component. Then she gets to a heart with wings, and it says Oliver.

“This is for my little brother, he died when he was 3.”

“I’m sorry... What was your favorite thing to do with him?”

She lights up as if she had been waiting for someone to ask her.

“Well, I used to do this thing where I would spin him all around. But he also loved swimming, and he had seven awards!”

“Whoa! 7? That’s amazing for a 3-year-old!”

“I know, right?”

“Do you wanna see mine?”

“Sure!”

I showed her my art board, which had a smiley face, labeled “happy smiling faces”, a heart labeled “kind hearts”, and a sunshine labeled “beautiful days”. All things I wanted for my future, and all things I treasure from my past.

“Wow, I love that.” She went back to her seat and smiled at me once more.

I went back to my table and looked around at everything. This seems like a cool place, I thought to myself.

I started asking to get vegan meals, and I got to eat in the cafeteria with everyone else (because I was off RTU). I made friends with everyone there; they even started calling me Madam President and Dizzy Izzy. Because I kept stumbling and falling in my delirious state. And I told

everyone I wanted to become president. We sang rap songs together and drew pictures of each other. I even memorized everyone's name.

I got into a rhythm once I found the schedule. It was lovely having the day planned out instead of nonverbally pacing around all day and blacking out.

They wrote me letters to take home. I still have them hanging on my wall to this day, along with the silly caricatures.

The next day, I woke up and started reading the book my parents brought me. I wondered how long it would take for everyone else to be up.

Sure enough, a half hour later, I started hearing commotion outside my door. I walked down the long

hallway to the front desk and asked for my hygiene bag. Even though it didn't have eyeliner or blush, it basically had everything I needed for a clean, successful day here at Peaceful Meadow. I even asked for a handful of plastic mini hair ties to put my hair into a two-pigtail half-up half-down style since I didn't have my curling iron.

Once I was dressed and ready for the day, I walked back down the long hallway to grab my schedule. It had stuff like group therapy, a nursing group, and an art group. The nursing group is a little deceptive; it's not like we sat and learned about how to be a nurse. It was where one of the nurses ran a class about how to get our lives back on track. It was basically whatever they wanted to preach to us.

Most of the day, though, was coloring pictures or eating one of our three meals plus a snack. It was a lot of socializing, too, which I normally would hate. But between the new medicine I was on and the type of people inside the mental hospital, I was in my element.

During snack, I heard Bella singing,

“Body crazy

Curvy wavy

Big titties

Little waist,

Body crazy

Curvy wavy

Big titties

Little waist”

“I wish!” I jokingly said from across the room,
“Izzy, your body's rocking!” Bella says as she walks over to me. I am blushing hard. Then we both simultaneously pull our baggy t-shirts tight around our waist to show everyone in the room. Whistles and applause erupted. I turn to look out the glass window in the room, looking out into the hallways, and see a psychiatric technician shaking her head with disapproval and making a note in her notepad.

“Okay, everyone, it's time for group therapy.” A woman says, clapping her hands together, “Let's push all these heavy chairs in a circle!”

I did as she asked and then sat down. I noticed some kids were sitting on the outside, coloring or doodling instead of joining us.

“Let's start with an ice breaker, what's everyone's favorite movie?”

We went around the room and each shared our favorite movies cheerfully. When it got to me, I had to think for a second,

“Cars 2”

Later that day, I was sitting with a few girls, and they just so happened to be playing Cars 2 on the small TV.

Kennedy (Kenny Enny, as I lovingly call her) spoke up,

“What's this dumb movie even about?”

“I don't know,” I lied as if I didn't know it was a high-octane masterpiece of espionage and emotion.

The next day I felt like a million bucks! I never ran out of things to talk about, I never ran out of people to talk to, and I never ran out of time to listen. I actually felt a little popular in the mental hospital, like I had finally found my people.

It was outside time now, and everyone was buzzing with excitement. The sun was bright, and the cool breeze was perfect. I start dribbling a basketball and overhear a conversation,

“Did you know that some people think we live on the back of a turtle?”

“And that turtle is on the back of another,” I chime in, finishing his sentence. He laughs, and I pass him the ball.

“Well, that’s just dumb,” a girl says, shooting a basket.

“Nothing but net,” She boasts while fetching the runaway ball.

Later that day, J-la came over to my table.

“They said I was going home today, but they lied!” She angrily threw a piece of paper at me,

“Hey! What was that?” I felt frustrations bubbling in my chest.

“I’m pissed the fuck off. Dr. McCock just uses us as guinea pigs, it’s fucked up they drug us like zoo animals.”

“Is his name really Dr McCock?” I look around the table and realize it’s just a mean nickname.

I had been looking forward to Monday for a couple of

days now, because they said they would release me. But after hearing one too many people complain about not going home when they say you can, I was nervous. But, sure enough, on Monday, I met with my social worker and parents to get the process started.

I remember all the inappropriate music I played on the car ride home. I wasn't allowed to listen to stuff like that in the hospital. We stopped at Meijer on the way home to get vegan Ben and Jerry's. And then I'll go to Taco Bell to get my comfort food.

I'm now on two antipsychotics that I'm still taking to this day. For a while, I wasn't allowed to use knives or handle my medication, and when I finally came home, my room was spotless, because they had searched every inch of it for weed

and for clues about what had been going on with me.

Adjusting to life after that was strange.

The weekend I got out of the mental hospital, my best friend, Ella, came to visit me at my house. We played raunchy card games, drew pretty pictures of butterflies, and listened to good music. It showed me I could still have a social life without weed. She never made me feel like being sober was something to be fixed. We watched romcoms and belly laughed at the most random shit. Even after months upon months of not seeing each other, we have always been able to pick things right back up.

It's been months since I left the mental hospital. I still don't have a clear plan or ambition beyond my current life. But I figured I should fill my days with things that keep me

grounded, not high in the clouds (if you know what I mean).

I work with my dad selling property. I keep writing music, and I have even started drawing after my therapist suggested it. And I spend time with my family and friends.

I had to face everything I'd been running from, and everything I'd done to keep from feeling it. Somewhere in all that breaking and piecing back together, I started caring about more than just myself. I became softer. Kinder. Not perfect. Not perfectly healed. But someone who wants the people around me to be at peace, not dragged into the whirlpool of my panic spirals. I care about the world. I care about my future, about all the cheesy stuff I thought I was too cool to care about before. But did I regain my spark? Sure, I had conquered my perception of reality and sauted it

with a juicy psychoactive marinade, made a bunch of new friends, and grew as a person tremendously. But did I finally find my spark? Did I feel that burst of energy in the morning to wake up and make the most of my life? I did start playing music again. It was pleasant and enriching again, but it didn't feel as all-encompassing as before.

I think it's time I start really looking for my spark. I'll travel the ends of the earth to find it. And when I do, I'm never letting go again.

I take out my globe, close my eyes, and put my finger on the UK.

Crawley, London

The instant I walked out of my hotel room, I smelled ashy smoke with a chemical tang. Cigarettes. The habit has always been a pet peeve of mine; I find it utterly disconcerting. But, just as quickly as my heart warmed up to the city, my nose did too. I walked around in the chilly weather until I saw a traditional English pub.

The room was bursting with energy, and people were packed tightly into every crevasse. I sat down, trying to order

over the loud voices surrounding me.

“What?” The waitress asked, grabbing the pen from behind her ear. I’m practically yelling now,

“I would like the vegan sausage and beans with chips!”

When I got my food, I was a little overstimulated.

Boustrious laughs, and an obnoxiously loud discussion pounded through my ears and saturated my brain. I walked up to the bar and nearly everything caught my attention.

“Can I please have a Strongbow dark fruit cider?”

“Sure.” I make it back to my table to eat the aggressively average-tasting food. And drink my delightful cider. I started to feel a little warm and happy. And I looked around the pub at all the smiling faces, and happy hearts, and I just soaked it all up. It was a refreshing and delightful visit.

Blankenberge, Belgium

In a spat of desperation, I took a shuttle to Blankenberge. I did end up laughing the whole 30-minute bus ride.

“I see a full moon.” The man sitting next to me says, clapping his hands together. In the middle of the day? I thought.

“Did you want to take a picture?” I ask earnestly. The man bursts into laughter, and I look out the window to see a man’s full ass crack hanging out of his pants.

It was cold in Belgium, cold and windy. My

bones felt like they were shriveling up. And my skin was inching away, separating from my muscles and fatty tissue.

I wandered the city and found a waffle with chocolate and strawberries. The waffle had a crispy outer layer of caramelized sugar. And the inside was perfectly fluffy, and the strawberries were so sweet and fresh.

I stepped into an old church, and the paintings seemed to jump out at me. I could smell the thousand burning candles, and taste the wood and must. I saw people standing, sitting, and kneeling. I wondered what was passing through their minds. Was there anyone thinking what I was thinking? Probably not,

as they were all enamored with the beauty and history.

And I was thinking, “Man, that waffle was good”.

Nothing spiritual or emotional crossed my brain or body for even a second. I couldn’t even tell if I was guilty about my lack of caring. My spark definitely wasn’t religion.

It quickly warmed up as the wind calmed. But by then, I was already back on the hunt.

Kirkwall, Scotland

I was in a piss ass mood in Kirkwall. I was tired, cold, and very hungry. Not to mention filled to the brim with hopelessness. I wandered around till I stumbled into a tiny restaurant.

“Can I please have the vegan miso soup and katsu curry?”

“Yes, of course! That will be 18 pounds.” She smiled as I tapped my card to the reader. Right next door, I saw a bookstore, perfect. It took me longer than I’d like to admit to decide what to get. But when I finally did, I waited patiently in line. I saw a woman digging in her butt. She then smelled it.

I sat in a floral alley to read while sipping my
miso soup. It was nice and relaxing, and exactly what I
needed.

Stornoway Scotland

The drive into Stornoway was beautiful, all rocky hillsides and purple grass. I just imagined myself sprawled on the flowers with a sandwich.

When I reached the city, I found a veggie burger, some “chips”, and some delicious cherry berry cider. I felt nourished and buzzed by the end of my meal. I talked with the friendly bartender for a while, and it really brightened my mood.

On my way out, I saw a crocheted sheep hat,
and I just had to get it. This must have been my
favorite stop so far.

Greenock, Scotland

I went from pub to pub with no real direction or purpose. Just waiting for my spark to come knock me over the head. I went to get my nails done, and I thought it would be a good chance to spend some time with a local, but he barely understood me, so that was a bust. In fact, it was a little frustrating for both of us because I wanted them shorter, and he did not understand the word shorter. In all

fairness, “shorter” doesn’t really sound like a real word
anyway. Scotland was nice, and I love their tape.

Belfast, Ireland

I started the day off with a bookstore, and I got two books to read on my adventures. Then I went on a pub crawl.

“Go into the ladies room, and press the big red button,” the bartender instructed pouring my drink.

Big red button? Sure enough, I went into the ladies room and boom, there it was. A big red button that said “do not press under any circumstances”, so of

course I pressed it. And the disco ball fell from the sky, and it started playing “It’s raining men”, the whole visual was widely impressive. The colorful lights still play through my head. It made me laugh and smile, and it was cool. I walked back out laughing and the bartender shrugged and smiled. I was starting to loosen up to the people and the feelings in my bones.

Dublin, Ireland

My time in Dublin was very straightforward. For example, all I did was get a tattoo for my hilarious uncle Michael. I climbed the 10 million flights of stairs to the parlor and held my breath the entire 20 minutes it took to write his initials in cursive and two dates, the day he was born, and the day he died. The tattoo artist was very kind, funny, and professional. And there really isn't much to say

about my final stop. The whole thing was drenched in a quiet sadness that the trip was ending.

Home

It was not good to be home. I yearned for the excitement of travel and the warmth of company. I fell in love with myself again, and I fell in love with the world. But more than anything, I fell into an intense hunger, hunger for friendship, love, community, something that would make me feel like I'm worth having around. I hate that I need to go back out there. I hate that I found my spark. Because she's being

wheeled around in the mental hospital, she's getting
tattooed in Dublin, and she's swimming in the
oceans, I traveled, tickling fish and pissing off
lifeguards. For now, though, I'll take the simple
pleasures in life like listening to music on the beach or
reading by the fire. I can live with that and be just fine.

Dizzy Izzy's Spark

Something made me lose my spark, and I can't quite put my finger on what relinquished it. Quitting music, smoking weed, hiding things from my family, or some unrelated chemical imbalance that was out of my control. But anyway, I know what got it back. And it wasn't my friends, or getting on medicine, or even touring the world. It was finding my humanity.

During that time in the mental hospital, there were countless people on my side, helping me heal from my

psychosis: Nurses, therapists, family members, psychiatric technicians, and even fellow patients. People started helping me relight my spark from the ground up the second I reached rock bottom. And it made me realize how good people can be, how good I could be, how good humanity could be. That's what ignites my flame of ambition, the warmth in my heart, and the fireworks that everyone can see. The thought that one day, we could be better.