Circumstantial Evidence

A Sparkles Rebellion story

Faith Power and Truth Holy Wars

Story developed through human-AI collaboration under William Byrd’s direction. AI-generated story illustrations developed under his direction; original game card artwork is hand-drawn by William Byrd.

After the Show

The Lantern had settled into that warm stretch of evening when nobody seemed ready to leave.

Sparkles Rebellion had finished her performance nearly half an hour ago, but traces of the show still lingered throughout the room. A few guests hummed the final song. Others gathered near the bar, reenacting their favorite moments with gestures that became less accurate and more dramatic with every retelling.

Sparkles sat at a table with her friends Julian and Cameron, one hand resting around a glass and the other punctuating a story that had already made both men laugh twice.

None of them was drunk. They had each enjoyed a couple of drinks—just enough to soften the evening’s edges and loosen certain truths that might otherwise have remained safely behind the teeth.

Sparkles was halfway through a merciless account of a malfunctioning spotlight when she stopped speaking.

Julian waited.

Cameron waited.

Sparkles continued looking toward the opposite side of the room.



“Did the rest of that sentence require a separate performance?” Julian asked.

Sparkles blinked. “What?”

“You were telling us about the spotlight.”

“I finished.”

“You stopped in the middle of a word.”

“Then it was an artistic ending.”

Cameron followed Sparkles’ gaze. Near the other side of the Lantern, a man sat alone at one of the small tables. He wore a dark blue shirt with the sleeves rolled neatly below his elbows. A half-finished drink sat beside his phone. He appeared perfectly content watching the room.

Cameron looked back at Sparkles.

“Oh.”

Sparkles’ expression hardened. “Do not ‘oh’ me.”

Julian turned discreetly, which for Julian meant rotating his entire upper body and staring openly.

Sparkles grabbed his wrist. “Could you be any less subtle?”

“I could stand on the table and point.”

“Your restraint is deeply moving.”

Julian faced her again. “How long has this been happening?”

“How long has what been happening?”

“This.”

Sparkles glanced at the man once more. “There is no ‘this.’ I merely noticed that he possesses a face.”

“You have been noticing that face all evening,” Cameron said.

“I am an artist. Observation is part of my nature.”

“You perform in heels and sequins.”

“And yet my eyes continue to function.”

The Investigation

Cameron leaned closer. “Do you think he’s gay?”

Sparkles’ confidence disappeared for half a second.

It returned wearing armor.

“I have no idea,” she said casually. “Nor do I particularly care.”

Julian looked down at Sparkles’ hand. “You’re crushing your napkin.”

Sparkles released it. The napkin remained twisted into something resembling a distress signal.

“I care only in the broad philosophical sense,” Sparkles explained. “Human curiosity. Scientific inquiry.”

“Of course,” Cameron said.

“We should investigate.”

Julian smiled. “You just said you didn’t care.”

“I don’t. That is what allows me to remain objective.”

All three looked across the room.

The man lifted his glass, took a drink and returned his attention to the stage.



Julian nodded slowly. “Definitely gay.”

Sparkles looked at him. “Based on what?”

“The way he held the glass.”

“That is the stupidest thing you have ever said, and I attended your birthday speech.”

“I’m telling you, there was something in the wrist.”

Cameron shook his head. “No. We are not determining a stranger’s sexuality through wrist analysis.”

“Thank you,” Sparkles said.

“He could be bisexual.”

Sparkles stared at him.

Cameron shrugged. “We exist.”

“Yes, darling. I remember. You mention it whenever two attractive people enter the same room.”

Julian rested his chin in his hand. “What about his clothes?”

“What about them?” Cameron asked.

“The shirt fits.”

Sparkles looked offended. “Straight men can wear clothes that fit.”

“I know. I’m just saying it complicates matters.”

“The two of you have become useless remarkably quickly.”

Cameron glanced across the room again. “Maybe we can see whether he notices you.”

“He watched the show,” Sparkles said.

“Everyone watched the show.”

“He watched differently.”

Julian smiled. “How?”

“With appreciation.”

“You were onstage wearing enough reflective material to redirect aircraft. Appreciation was unavoidable.”

Sparkles lifted her glass. “Jealousy has made you cruel.”

Test One

Julian pointed toward the bar. “Walk past him.”

“And accomplish what?”

“See whether he looks.”

Sparkles gave him a flat stare. “Everyone looks when I walk past.”

“Then walk ordinarily.”

A silence settled over the table.

Sparkles placed one hand against her chest. “I don’t understand the request.”

Cameron laughed. “Go to the bar. Don’t perform. Don’t pose. Just walk past his table and come back.”

“This is beneath me.”

“Then stay here.”

Sparkles stood immediately.

She adjusted her jacket, checked her reflection in the dark screen of her phone and began walking toward the bar with an ease so carefully constructed that it could not possibly be mistaken for natural movement.

The man looked up as Sparkles passed.

Their eyes met.

The man smiled.

Sparkles nearly collided with a chair.



She recovered without breaking stride, reached the bar and stood there for several seconds before apparently remembering that a person usually approached a bar for a reason. She requested water, waited for it and returned to the table.

She sat down with complete dignity.

“Well?” Julian asked.

“He smiled at me.”

Cameron nodded. “That could mean something.”

“It does.”

“It could also mean he enjoyed your performance.”

Sparkles frowned. “Why are you committed to ruining my life?”

“You didn’t have a life with him five minutes ago.”

“I could have.”

Julian pointed toward the man. “He is looking over here.”

Sparkles froze.

“Don’t turn around,” Cameron warned.

Sparkles immediately turned around.

The man was looking toward their table—but when their eyes met, he lifted one hand toward a server passing behind them.

Sparkles slowly turned back.

“He was calling the server,” Cameron said.

“I saw.”

Julian took a drink. “Maybe he became thirsty because he saw you.”

“Finally,” Sparkles said, “a serious contribution to this investigation.”

Circumstantial Evidence

For the next twenty minutes, the three friends examined every available piece of evidence.

The man tapped his foot when the music changed. Inconclusive.

He complimented a server’s earrings. Suspicious, according to Julian; basic human courtesy, according to Cameron.

He checked his phone twice. This produced an argument over whether he was messaging a date, canceling a date or reading something completely unrelated to dating.

He crossed one leg over the other.

Julian opened his mouth.

“No,” Cameron and Sparkles said together.

A man stopped beside the stranger’s table and spoke to him briefly. The three friends leaned closer as if proximity to one another might improve their hearing across the room. The visitor laughed, patted the man’s shoulder and walked away.

Sparkles narrowed her eyes.

“What did that mean?”

“It meant they know each other,” Cameron said.

“Thank you, detective.”

Julian considered the matter. “The shoulder contact seemed familiar.”

“It lasted less than a second.”

“You measured it?”

“I observed it.”

Cameron looked between them. “We have learned absolutely nothing.”

“We have learned that you lack commitment,” Sparkles said.

“We could simply ask him.”

Sparkles stared at Cameron as though he had proposed arson.

Julian smiled. “Yes, Sparkles. You could walk over and introduce yourself.”

“I could.”

Neither friend spoke.

“I could do it right now.”

They continued waiting.

Sparkles took another drink.

“I simply have no desire to.”

“You have reorganized the table twice so you can see him,” Julian said.

“The original arrangement was hostile to conversation.”

“You moved my chair behind a plant.”

“The plant listens better.”

A Passing Administrative Concern

The man rolled his sleeves slightly higher.

Sparkles watched him do it.

“Oh, that is completely unnecessary,” she muttered.

“What happened?” Cameron asked.

“The sleeves.”

“What about them?”

“He knows exactly what he is doing.”

The man, unaware of the accusation, picked up his drink.

“He is sitting alone and adjusting his sleeves,” Cameron said.

“And somehow destroying my life in the process.”

Julian laughed. “He hasn’t even spoken to you.”

“Exactly. Imagine the damage once he starts.”

Sparkles looked across the room again. Her expression softened before she could stop it.

“He really is beautiful,” she said.

For once, neither friend teased her.

Then Julian asked, “Have you planned the wedding?”

Sparkles turned sharply. “Don’t be ridiculous.”

“The reception?”

“No.”

“Names for the children?”

“Julian.”

“I’m only asking how far the investigation has progressed.”

Sparkles looked down at her glass. “I may have briefly considered whether he would get along with my uncle.”

Cameron covered his face.

Julian bent forward over the table, shaking with silent laughter.



“It was one thought,” Sparkles insisted. “A passing administrative concern.”

“You don’t know his name,” Cameron managed.

“That would obviously be addressed before meeting the family.”

Julian wiped beneath one eye. “This man truly has destroyed your life.”

“Thank you. I have been saying that for half an hour.”

Cameron’s amusement softened. “You’re afraid he’ll say no.”

Sparkles’ eyes moved to him.

“I am not afraid of rejection.”

“You nearly walked into a chair because he smiled.”

“The chair entered my path aggressively.”

“He might be straight,” Julian said. “Or gay. Or bi. Or interested. Or unavailable. None of these little tests can tell us.”

Sparkles looked toward the man again.

This time, the man caught her looking.

There was no server behind them. No stage performance demanding attention. No obvious reason for the smile he gave Sparkles.

Sparkles looked away first.

Cameron leaned forward. “Go talk to him.”

The Only Useful Evidence

Sparkles exhaled slowly.

Then she stood.

Julian blinked. “Wait. Really?”

Sparkles straightened her jacket. “Someone at this table must demonstrate courage, and it clearly will not be either of you.”

“We’re not the ones in love with a stranger,” Julian said.

Sparkles gave him a dangerous look. “If I do not return, delete my recent messages and tell everyone I died beautifully.”

She crossed the room.

Her friends watched as she approached the small table. The man looked up, surprised at first, then smiled and gestured toward the empty chair.

Sparkles sat.

They spoke for several minutes.

From across the room, Julian and Cameron attempted to interpret the conversation.

The man laughed once.

Cameron gripped Julian’s arm.

Sparkles smiled.

Julian whispered, “This is going well.”

Then the man said something neither friend could hear.

Sparkles paused.

The man lifted his phone and showed her something on the screen. Sparkles looked at it, nodded and said a few more words. They shook hands warmly before Sparkles stood.



She walked back across the Lantern.

Her face revealed nothing.

She reached the table, pulled out her chair and sat down. Julian and Cameron leaned toward her, waiting.

Sparkles picked up her glass.

“He’s married.”

For one perfect second, the table was silent.

Then Julian collapsed against Cameron, and Cameron struck the table with both hands as laughter overtook them. Julian attempted to speak, failed and laughed even harder.

Sparkles sat between them with the wounded dignity of a deposed monarch.

“You spent nearly an hour trying to determine which men he finds attractive,” Cameron finally managed.

Sparkles took a long drink. “I was gathering information.”

“And did you gather his husband?” Julian asked.

That finished them.

Their laughter carried across the Lantern. A few people nearby turned to see what had happened.

The man at the other table glanced over. When Sparkles met his eyes, he offered an apologetic smile and raised his glass.

Sparkles raised her own glass in return.

Cameron finally caught his breath. “Are you all right?”

Sparkles watched the man take another drink.

“No,” she said. “But apparently his husband is doing wonderfully.”

Julian and Cameron erupted all over again.

Sparkles tried to maintain her wounded expression for another few seconds.

Then she began laughing with them.



Fiction notice: Sparkles Rebellion, Julian, Cameron, the Lantern, and all events in this story are fictional. Sexual orientation cannot be reliably determined from clothing, gestures, interests, or mannerisms; the friends' failed assumptions are part of the comedy, not factual tests.