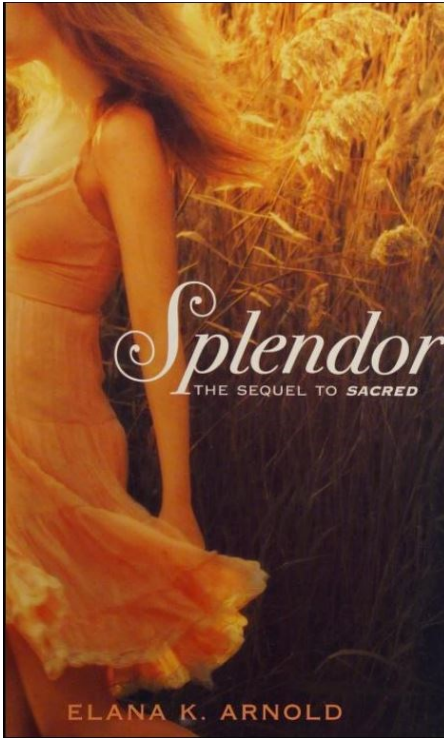


# SPLENDOR



*Young Adult*

**By Elana K. Arnold**

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## CONTENT WARNING

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### Book Summary:

Love and loss help a teenage girl discover more about herself.

### Summary of Concerns:

This book contains sexual activities; sexual nudity; mild profanity; alcohol and drug use by minors.

**3** / 5

**Minor Restricted**  
BookLooks Review Rating

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20	<p>"Don't be such a baby, Scarlett. Of course we went to bars. We drank jenever, this Dutch gin. At first it tasted just awful, but after a while I liked it. It was sort of sweet. And it's cute how you drink it- they serve it in a shot glass, full to the brim, and you take the first sip without using your hands, just bending down to the glass. Adrian could drink the whole shot like that, tipping it up in his mouth without his hands. He has very talented lips," she said, smiling wickedly.</p> <p>..."What were you doing?"</p> <p>Lily raised her terribly expressive eyebrow. "What do you think we were doing?"</p> <p>I gasped. I couldn't help it. "Lily...did you have sex with him?"</p> <p>"Uh...of course I did!"</p> <p>..."Don't look so shocked Scar. I mean, I know you're private and everything, but it's common knowledge that you and Will have been going at it since last spring."</p>
21	<p>"Well? How was it?"</p> <p>..."Pretty terrible, actually," she burst out. "I mean, it hurt. More than I thought it would. We only did it twice- once at his place, this little tiny apartment. It was one room! It didn't even have a separate kitchen. And I don't know the last time he washed his sheets. The second time was at the hotel, the night Mom caught us. I mean, I think maybe I could have grown to like it...if we'd done it a few more times...but honestly, Scar, the kissing was better. Way better."</p>
22	<p>"I guess I can't believe it, though. What's up? Why aren't you and Will..."</p> <p>...When we were together, I didn't feel much like talking. I felt like touching. I wanted to put my body as close as possible to Will's; I wanted to twine fingers, and legs, and tongues. I wanted to press him against me. I wanted his hands in my hair. I wanted to run my hands up underneath his shirt, across the flat panel of his stomach, across the line of downy hair that began at his belly button and extended down into the mystery beneath his pants.</p>
23	<p>"So your mom came in?" I nudged Lily back to her story. "Boy, did she. I heard the sound the hotel door makes after someone's stuck a key card in the slot and the little electric mechanism is unfastening the lock. And Adrian froze- absolutely froze- on top of me. I remember thinking, 'Please, God, anyone but Dad,' so when it was my mom, for a second I felt relieved, you know? And then she said, 'I will give you two minutes to disappear, young man.' She actually called him young man. At least she waited in the next room while he got dressed.</p>
28	<p>"Lily had sex," said Henry. "Is she gonna be pregnant like your horse?"</p> <p>..."Sorry I can't help with the dishes. I've got a...date."</p> <p>"Are you gonna have sex?"</p>
30	<p>He knelt next to me and fit his lips against mine. His kiss was hot and long, and I found myself drifting deeply into it, pressing myself forward toward his warmth.</p>
31	<p>If by "normal teenage socialization" Will meant binge drinking, cruel cajoling, and overwhelmingly loud music, we got it in spades as the evening wore on.</p>
33	<p>Tonight, though, he was pouring the drinks for some game they were all playing. Lily was just finishing a shot in the Dutch manner she'd described to me: no hands. Connell- poured her another.</p>
34	<p>I watched her raise the drink to her mouth. Her hand was unsteady. She'd been drinking for a while.</p>

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	<p>"I think you've had enough to drink." But when I tried to take Lily's glass, Connell blocked my way.</p> <p>"Hey, Big Red," he said, but his grin was cold. "Want a drink?"</p> <p>"No thanks."</p> <p>"Oh, come on Scar, loosen up," said Mike.</p> <p>"Yeah, Red Vine. Live a little." Connell draped his arm across my shoulder, but he looked past me at Will, clearly taunting him. "You must be getting tired of Jew Boy by now."</p> <p>...She had finished off another shot and was peeling Brandon Becker's fingers away from his cup of beer so that she could commandeer it.</p> <p>...Lily looked at me through the haze of her drunkenness.</p> <p>...She sipped her beer while she considered this.</p> <p>...She drained her beer and then threw the plastic cup in Will's direction.</p>
41	<p>My heart pounded and my lips felt swollen from Will's kisses, but he looked even more pulled apart than I felt; there was a shift in his eyes, a hunger that I hadn't seen there before</p>
44	<p>All around us were trees and grass and the bright blue sky. Will turned to me, and I told him, and when we kissed the fire that sprang up between us was undeniable, as certain as the sun and just as hot.</p>
45	<p>Together we sank into the grass, together we knelt in something that felt as close to a prayer as anything I had ever known- our bodies turned in toward each other's, the long press of Will's chest against mine.</p> <p>And when he lay me down in the meadow and pushed his body to mine, I welcomed the weight of him.</p> <p>...His hands- at last!- pulled my T-shirt up from the waistband of my jeans, and his fingers splayed against my rib cage, tracing little lines against my rib cage, tracing little lines against my skin, threatening to drive me mad.</p> <p>...Ahh. The press of him- the luxurious weight of his body stretched against the length of mine. This time the thrust of his hips was unmistakable. I felt a tingle of fear mixed with desire in the pit of my belly, and lower. There was a mystery there, in the masculine hardness of him, and perhaps danger, too.</p> <p>...Will sensed me stiffen a little in his arms. "Are you okay?"</p> <p>"Just nervous," I admitted. "Aren't you?"</p> <p>He didn't answer right away, and in the gap of his silence I was struck by a realization. "You've done this before?"</p> <p>...I pushed hard on his chest and he shifted enough for me to slide out from underneath him.</p> <p>"Tell me," I said.</p> <p>He nodded. "It was last summer, before we came to the island."</p>
100	<p>"I miss the way you pull me tight after we kiss for a while."</p> <p>"Mm-hmm."</p> <p>"I miss the way it felt that day on the trail...the weight of you on top of me."</p> <p>He made a sound like a groan.</p> <p>..."I miss your eyes. The way they close partway when I kiss your collarbone. I miss the way you hold your breath sometimes, when you want to feel something deeply, when you're really paying attention to my hands. I miss watching you ride</p>

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	<p>your horse. I miss your laugh."            "That's a lot to miss," I said at last, warm to the core and full of pleasure.</p>
112	<p>Of course Lily's parents' intent had been to host a dry party, and there was plenty of nonalcoholic choices- tubs full of sodas and water bottles, along with the disgusting-looking punch inside- but they sat largely untouched after Mike Ryan, dressed as Frankenstein's monster, replete with stitches and screws in his neck, arrived with several cases of beer and a few bottles of something stronger. "We can't let those kids drink at our house," I heard Jack telling Laura in the kitchen when I headed inside for more chips.            "Oh, Jack," she said, "don't be such a hypocrite. We both know how much you drank in high school."            "Well, you weren't exactly captain of the sobriety club yourself," he shot back at her.            "I didn't say I was. But come on, Jack, you know it's better to let them drink here than to send them off to party who knows where. And it's not like they'll be driving anywhere."</p>
113	<p>Lily tilted her head back, making the long line of her throat even longer, the slope from her chin to her breasts hypnotizing. As she raised her hands above her head, all eyes were on the black lace of her corset, and everyone seemed to be wondering if it would slip low enough to reveal her nipples.</p>
118	<p>"Did you see how drunk got? So gross. I think it's sad that he's got nothing better to do than hang out with a bunch of high schoolers."</p>
151	<p>"Didja bang her?" asked Connell. "Didja knock her up?"</p>
159	<p>He reached into his satchel and pulled out a silver flask. He unscrewed the lid and poured a stream of honey-brown liquid into his soda. Without asking if I wanted any, he poured some into my glass too.            ...But a little alcohol wasn't such a big deal, I told myself as I pulled my glass across the table and took a sip.</p>
161	<p>His glass was empty now. He poured more liquid from his flask atop the clinking ice cubes and added another splash to my glass, though I'd barely sipped my drink.</p>
170	<p>"There is such a thing as abortion, you know. Anyway, I'm not having any kids."</p>
222	<p>We tangled together and kissed, his mouth warm and soft, the whole length of him so present, so absolutely real and solid against my body.            We kissed and kissed and it was like the rest of the world didn't matter at all.</p>
225	<p>We walked down the hall toward my room. We walked in and I watched as Will slowly, gently, pushed the door closed.            His eyes were full of intention as he turned to me. I reached out and stroked the dark stubble along his jawline. His hand reached up and took mine, turning it palm up. He kissed me there, on the soft center of my hand, then took each finger, one by one, between his lips.            Circles and lines, I mused, my logic fuzzy and disorganized. The hard press of his erection against my thigh. The straight, flat plane of his chest. The curve of my breasts pushed against him, the arch of my back as I stepped even closer. But Will had curves, too- the bow of his lips, the tilt of his chin. And I had lines- the long</p>

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	<p>sheet of hair that fell across my shoulders, the arrow-straight thrust of my desire for Will's touch.</p> <p>...But as his tongue looped around my smallest finger, his hot breath warming my skin, and as his gaze asked a question, I wanted to answer him not in words but in action.</p> <p>My hands found the hem of his wool sweater and pushed it up, catching his white tee, too. Will raised his arms over his head and I tugged off his sweater and shirt, leaving them tangled on the floor. Then my fingers splayed across his chest and I stepped up against him. Will's fingers weaved through my hair and he kissed me so gently.</p> <p>...I answered him by sliding even closer, winding my arms around his warm, naked back and tilting my head so he could kiss me more fully.</p> <p>We stumbled together toward the bed and sat on its edge.</p>
227	<p>I had spent hours thinking of this moment-Will returned to me, the two of us alone in a room, just the sound of our mingled breath and our kisses. I had imagined doing with him the things I did now...sliding my hands across his shoulders, tracing the line of his neck with my tongue, feeling his hands tangled again in my hair.</p> <p>I had imagined these things while riding Delilah. I had imagined them in class, staring out the window into the rain. I had imagined them while lying alone at night in this very bed, as my hands touched my breasts, my stomach, and reached down into my underwear.</p> <p>...I felt his hands winding up the back of my shirt, fumbling a little with the clasp of my bra before it came undone. Then he mirrored my earlier movement- sliding up my sweater and the tank top underneath, tangled together with my bra. The air felt cool against my bare skin, but it wasn't that I was suddenly colder without clothing that caused me to shiver, made my skin tighten into goose bumps. It was being seen. Will and I had fooled around before, and he'd touched me under my shirt, but this was the first time we'd been together like this- both of us half-naked, face to face in full light. My first instinct was to shake my hair forward to cover my breasts. But, I didn't want to hide from Will, not really. I wanted to see him, and be seen by him in return. So I straightened my shoulders and took Will's hand. Slowly, deliberately, I raised it and placed it over my left breast. His touch was hot and electric and my heartbeat quickened under his palm.</p> <p>Then Will leaned in close and kissed me again. We fell backward onto the pillows and fit our bodies together, chest to chest, hip to hip, our legs entwined. We kissed and kissed, our hands on each other's flesh, tongues in each other's mouths, my hair tangled around us both.</p> <p>Finally Will murmured, "What do you want to do?"</p> <p>..."I want to be naked with you," I said. "But I don't want to do anything that hurts. I want more of this"- running my fingers lightly up and down his sides- "just like this."</p> <p>"Oka," Will answered. We kissed again, and he ran his hand down the length of my thigh, but he didn't make a move to unbutton my jeans, or his.</p> <p>...So I slid my hands down between us, and I unfastened the button and then pulled the zipper of my jeans. Will's green eyes stared into mine as I pushed my pants down and snaked free of them. I left my underwear on.</p>

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	<p>And then, emboldened, I popped loose the five buttons on the fly of Will's jeans and pushed the rough denim across his hips, leaving his underwear on, too. He helped me push his pants the rest of the way and my gaze flitted down. His underwear were boxers, I guess, but shorter and tighter. They were blue. And they were stretched tight across his erection, a sight that both thrilled and terrified me.</p> <p>"These are cute," I teased, running my finger along the waistband of his underwear. "Boxer briefs, right?"</p> <p>"Mmm-hmm," he murmured distractedly, kissing my collarbone.</p> <p>...Even though we hadn't need to pull out any condoms- despite Will whispering yearningly that he had a few in his wallet, in case I changed my mind- I felt as though I had stepped to the other side of the invisible line that I had often imagined, the line between virginity and experience.</p>
277	<p>"So," she said, "spill it."</p> <p>I knew she wanted me to hear all about my time with Will.</p> <p>...I could tell her about how we'd lain together in my bed, how he'd kissed my breasts, flicked his tongue into my belly button, how I'd worked up the nerve at last to stretch my hand down between his thighs, how the sound he'd made at my touch did as much to turn me on as any of his kisses.</p>
279	<p>Alcohol was a given. So was pot. The thrumming music, the flickering fire, the briny ocean smell...it all combined into a witch's brew, a concoction designed to stoke the smoldering fire.</p> <p>After the Halloween party at Andy's house junior year, I'd resolved never to get drunk again. So as the beers got passed around, lubricating the conversation and the dancing and the kissing, too, I staunchly shook my head.</p> <p>Not Lily, though.</p> <p>..."Just a little nip," he said. "To warm you up."</p> <p>"Alcohol doesn't actually make you warmer," I said. "It only makes you feel warmer."</p> <p>"Isn't that just as good?" Gunner smiled and wagged the flask in front of me.</p> <p>...I accepted the flask, unscrewed it, and took a sip. I didn't know what kind of liquor it was; it was cool in my mouth but burned as I swallowed, and it tasted sweet and bitter all at once, like licorice.</p> <p>"What is this?"</p> <p>"Absinthe," Gunner said. "Do you like it?"</p> <p>I shrugged. Not really, but I took another sip anyway. And then a third. My year-old promise to myself to avoid drunkenness seemed less important with each sip. Eventually, Lily danced over to us. She looked like she'd maybe been doing more than drinking.</p> <p>...The absinthe was doing its job admirably; I wasn't so cold anymore, and the music seemed to have seeped into my muscles, moving my limbs almost without my deciding to do so.</p> <p>...Even Will seemed not so important as the absinthe moved through my system.</p> <p>..."My two people," Lily said, and it seemed to me that maybe her voice was slurred a little. Then she leaned over and kissed me, her lips colder than they should have been considering how hot her cheek felt, pressed against my face.</p>

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	<p>Then she kissed Gunner, this time longer and harder, and I couldn't look away from it.</p> <p>"Now the two of you kiss," Lily demanded. I looked at Gunner. He smiled and shrugged, as if it wasn't up to him, like he was just following orders. With one arm still around Lily's waist, he leaned into me, and almost hypnotized by the marble of his eye, the slant of his mouth, the beat of the music, and the blaze of fire, bewitched by the absinthe and the night, I kissed him back.</p> <p>His tongue tasted of smoke and spice and the sweetness of the same absinthe I'd drunk. He pushed into me, and I pushed back, and our kiss was like a challenge or a fight, almost bruising in its force.</p> <p>...I drank some, but not a lot, from Gunner's flask. I was starting to like the taste of absinthe.</p>
285	<p>Officially, Lily's death was caused by Ecstasy-induced hyperthermia and dehydration. Connell, a blubbering mess, told the cops that Gunner had given Lily the Ecstasy, but it wasn't like he'd slipped it in her drink. She had asked him to get some for her. She'd wanted to try it.</p> <p>...There had been a guy, Connell said, a guy whom his cousin hooked him up with, who sold Gunner the X.</p>

Profanity	Count
Ass	1
Shit	1