

CHAPTER ONE

The Spark Notebook



The page waited—blank, wide, expectant.

At the very top, in bold letters, stood five lines. They weren't just words. They were a promise:

Team Humanity Pledge

I carry my spark to learn and to act.

I use tools to help, never to harm.

I listen, I share, I speak the truth.

I protect the small and stand with the brave.

I will pass the flame—and never let it die.

Across the world, five kids wrote the same five lines. The pledge took shape on five pages, each mark its own. Each one of them felt, without knowing why, that the page carried more weight than paper.

Kezbah—Indian Wells, Arizona

The high desert air shimmered with heat, carrying a dusty scent of creosote warmed by the morning sun. Outside her hogan, on the deck under the endless, cloudless sky, Kezbah balanced a notebook on her knees. She pressed carefully with her black marker until the letters stood thick and blocky, her face tightening in concentration. Sweat dotted her brow, but she kept at it.

When the last line was finished, she traced it with her fingertip.

“Ajíltsoh,” she whispered—strong.

She pulled a flat stone from her pocket—a heart-shaped one she collected while herding sheep—and slipped it into her satchel alongside the notebook.

Stone and pledge. Weight and word.

She shut her eyes and imagined the heartstone faintly glowing.

Mei—Shanghai, China

Sunlight danced across the water outside Mei's canal house, scattering silver ripples between willows and passing boats. Somewhere a dog barked—a high, squeaky yelp that said nothing was wrong.

At her desk, Mei wrote swiftly, each stroke precise as brushwork. She paused to check for smudges, erasing two small ones. Perfect. As her nosy brother, Kai, walked in, she slid the notebook in a drawer.

“What’s that?”

“Homework,” Mei answered quickly, failing to hide her smile.

“Looks like fun homework.”

“Go,” she told him.

Her grin widened once he left. She shut the drawer and twisted the knob, sealing the pledge inside. Hidden. Safe. Yet close enough to grab if she ever needed it.

Júlia—São Paulo, Brazil

Music thumped up the stairs from the street, bass vibrating through the walls. Júlia sprawled on a fluffy rug on the floor, her purple pen racing in short bursts across both pages of her open notebook.

She doodled stars in the margins, then flipped through her sticker sheets.

Her hand hovered—then she found it: glittery gold letters spelling *Carnavall*

She slapped it on the notebook cover and laughed. Glitzy. Not plain anymore. She added swirling pinstripe patterns bursting like fireworks at the edges of the open pages.

“Homework, Júlia!” her mother called from the kitchen.

“This is homework!” she sang back.

She tilted the notebook and swore the sticker sparkled brighter than before. The pledge glowed as if it had already joined the party. *Aê!*

Saki—Kyoto, Japan

Saki sat cross-legged at her low table, aligning her notebook with the grain of the wood. She bowed her head slightly before beginning, treating the first line as a ritual. Her brush strokes were measured, balanced, quiet as a breath.

Saki had always read more slowly than the others, but she saw patterns faster than anyone else.

She paused between lines, just as she did during tea ceremony—breathing in through her nose, catching the faint scent of matcha, then letting out a soft whoosh, like blowing dandelion seeds into the wind. It was her way of letting the words settle.

When she finished the last letter, she tied a red silk cord around the notebook, the knot centered and tight.

She touched the knot once, gently, as though sealing a promise. Then she set the notebook on her shelf beside her kokeshi doll—a chubby wooden friend from a small temple gift shop in Kyoto.

She placed a small glass of water beside the aloe plant on her nightstand—a quiet reminder it would need it later.

Care first. Then tools.

Musa—Giza, Egypt

Musa leaned against the chipped window frame of his family's two-bedroom apartment, the night air drifting in from the narrow street below. It carried warm road dust and the yeasty heat of fresh aish baladi bread from the corner bakery. A donkey clopped past, sacks of grain swaying on its cart. The stairwell cat—no one's and everyone's—meowed at the door—again.

It was long past bedtime when he sat up in the dark, his dad's old flashlight cast a small circle across the open notebook in his lap.

His lips moved with every word as he wrote each line. Speaking the words felt just as important as writing them.

When he finished, he slid the notebook beneath his thick world history book filled with images of pyramids and temples, on the rickety bedside table. His flashlight slipped from his fingers, but he caught it just before it hit the floor.

"I will pass the flame—and never let it die," he whispered again, then clicked the light off.

The flame in his mind came alive. The words felt heavier than his voice—as if they had traveled through centuries before reaching him.

Sleep came fast and deep, the kind that usually took time. It felt like nights at his grandmother's home in Alexandria—safe, watched over, and loved.

He missed the beach.