Chapter 14

´This is awful,’ Hailey says. ´That poor family.’

She’s looking at One-Fifteen Sr. With sympathy that belongs to Brenda and Ms. Rosalie.

I blink several times. ´What?’

´His son lost everything because he was trying to do his job and protect himself. His life matters too, you know?’

I cannot right now. I can’t. I stand up or otherwise I will say or do something really stupid. Like punch her.

´I need to ... yeah.’ I say all that I can and start for the door, but Maya grabs the tail of my cardigan.

´Whoa, whoa. You guys haven’t worked this out yet,’ she says.

´Maya,’ I say as calmly as possible. ´Please let me go. I cannot talk to her. Did you not hear what she said?’

´Are you serious right now?’ Hailey asks. ´What’s wrong with saying his life matter too?’

´His life always matters more!’ My voice is gruff, and my throat is tight. ´That’s the problem!’

´’Starr! Starr!’ Maya says, trying to catch my eye. I look at her. ´What’s going on? You’re Harry in *Order of the Phoenix* angry lately.’

´Thank you!’ Hailey says. ´She’s been in bitch mode for weeks but wants to blame me.’

´Excuse you?’

There’s a knock on the door. ´Girls, is everything okay?’ Mrs. Yang asks.

´We’re fine, Mom. Video game stuff.’ Maya looks at me and lowers her voice. ´Please, sit down. Please?’

I sit on her bed. Commercials replace One-Fifteen Sr. On the TV and fill in the gap of silence we’ve created

I blurt out. ´Why did you unfollow my Tumblr? Why?’

She glances at Maya – quickly, but I notice – and goes, ´I don’t know what you’re talking about.’

´Cut the bullshit, Hailey. You unfollowed me. Months ago. Why?’

She doesn’t say anything.

I swallow. ´Is it because of the Emmet Till picture?’

´Oh my God,’ she says, standing up. ´Here weg o again. I am not gonna stay here and let you accuse me of something, Starr – ´

´You don’t text me anymore,’ I say. ´You freaked out about that picture.’

´Do you hear her?’ Hailey says to Maya. ´Once again, calling me racist.’

´I’m not calling you anything. I’m asking y question and giving you examples.’

´You’re insinuating!’

´I’ve never mentioned race.’

Silence comes between us.

Hailey shakes her head. Her lips are thin. ´Unbelievable.’ She grabs her jacket off Maya’s bed and starts fort he door. She Stopps, and her back is to me. ´You wanna really know why I unfollowed you, Starr? Because I don’t know who the hell you are anymore.’

She slams the door on her way out.

The news program returns on the television. They show footage of protests all over the country, not just in Garden Heights. Hopefully none of them used Khalil’s death to skip class or work.

Out of nowhere, Maya say, ´That’s not why.’

She’s staring at her closed door, her shoulders a bit stiff.

´Huh?’ I say.

´She’s lying,’ Maya says. ´That’s not why she unfollowed you. She said she didn’t wanna see that shit on her dashboard.’

I figured. ´That Emmet Till picture, right?’

´No. All the „black stuff,“ she called it. The petitions. The Black Panther pictures. That post on those four little girls who were killed in that church. The stuff about that Marcus Garvey guy. The one about those Black Panthers who were shot by the government.’

´Fred Hampton and Bobby Hutton,’ I say.

´Yeah. Them.’

Wow. She’s been paying attention. ´Why didn’t you tell me?’

She stares at her plush Finn on the floor. ´I hoped she’d change her mind before you found out. I should’ve known better though. It’s not like that’s the first fucked-up thing she’s said.’

´What are you talking about?’

Maya swallows hard. ´Do you remember that time she asked if my family ate a cat for Thanksgiving?’

´What? When?’

Her eyes are glossy. ´Freshman year. First period. Mrs. Edwards’s biology class. We’d just gotten back from Thanksgiving break. Class hadn’t started yet, and we were talking about what we did for Thanksgiving. I told you guys my grandparents visited, and it was their first time celebrating Thanksgiving. Hailey asked if we ate a cat. Because we’re Chinese.’

Ho-ly shit. I’m wracking my brain right now. Freshman year is so clse to middle school; there’s a huge possibility I said or did something extremely stupid. I’m afraid to know, but I ask, ´What did I say?’

´Nothing. You had this look on your face like you couldn’t believe she said that. She claimed it was a joke and laughed. I laughed, and then you laughed.’ Maya blinks. A lot. ´I only laughed because I thought I was supposed to. I felt like shit the rest of the week.’

´Oh.’

´Yeah.’

*I* feel like shit now. I can’t believe I let Hailey say that. Or has she always joked like that? Did I always laugh because I thought I had to?

That’s the problem. We let people say stuff, and they say it so much that it becomes okay to them and normal for us. What’s the point of having a voice if you’re gonna be silent in those moments you shouldn’t be?

´Maya?’ I say.

´Yeah?’

´We can’t let her get away with saying stuff like that again, okay?’

She cracks a smile. ´A minority alliance?’

´Hell, yeah,’ I say, and we laugh.

´All right. Deal.’

Questions

1 – What importance do social media have for Starr and her friends? Give an example from the text.

2 – Why does it matter to Starr that Hailey unfollowed her? Why did she unfollow Starr?

3 – „*That’s the problem. We let people say stuff, and they say it so much that it becomes okay to them and normal for us. What’s the point of having a voice if you’re gonna be silent in those moments you shouldn’t be?“*

Can you see any parallels to current events in the real world?

4 – How is a „bubble“ created on the Internet? Does it work in the real world too?

