

YOU
DON'T
KNOW
everything,
JILLY P!

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1.

The house smells of homemade tomato sauce when I get home from school, a sure sign that Dad is cooking dinner. Mom lies on the couch, her laptop propped on her knees. A line of belly-white skin stretches between the bottom of her shirt and the waistline of her pants. My baby sister is inside, just waiting to join us out here. Mom has shoulder-length copper hair, a small nose, and light brown eyes. I look a lot like her, but my hair is longer and I'm not pregnant.

Dad is sitting in front of the television. His short, wavy hair is black, except for a small off-center tuft at the front that's been white since he was eighteen. His Italian skin is a few shades darker than Mom's and mine.

A photograph of a Black teen in a blue tank top fills the television screen. She is smiling, and Mickey Mouse earrings dangle from her ears. The news anchor introduces us to "Ella Davila, age fifteen, fatally shot in an incident with police in Santa Rosa, California." Details at eleven.

"Again?" Dad says. "This world gets scarier and scarier."

"No kidding," says Mom.

Dad shuts off the TV and turns to me, wiping the concern from his face as quickly as the image on the screen

disappears. As if it didn't happen if we don't mention it. "So, Jilly, how was school?"

"Nothing special." That's true. It was an utterly boring day. "Tests in math, science, and social studies."

"Ugh," Dad says. "Sounds like a bummer."

"Pretty much," I say, and head to my room.

I flip open my laptop and log on to De La Court. The books in B. A. Delacourt's Magically Mysterious Vidalia trilogy are my favorite books in the world, and De La Court is the official website for news and information about the series, as well as for connecting with other fans.

I open Young Vidaliens, a chat room specifically for kids ages eleven to thirteen. I'm twelve, right in the middle. Officially, that's who the books are for anyway, but a lot of the chat rooms are for people fourteen and older. It's not fair, but there are lots of adults who read the books too. And how could you blame them? I plan to keep returning to Vidalia as long as I'm able to read.

Kids younger than eleven aren't allowed on the site, but I've seen a few, at least based on the way they type. I got an account on my eleventh birthday and I've been to De La Court almost every day since.

* * *

JillyinP has entered the chat.

*Hi, **JillyinP**. **BADisGreat**, **profoundinoaktown**, **PureGreenElvenGrl**, and **SwordWielder42** are already here. Pull up a chair (or a tree branch if you're a wood elf) and join in.*

JillyinP: Hey everyone

BADisGreat: hi J

PureGreenElvenGrl: hey Jilly. Profound was just trying to tell us that the real hero of Vidalia is Cecil.

JillyinP: But he's ORANGE!

Everyone in Vidalia has an aura based on how good they are. Generally, good people glow green. People who are more questionable glow yellow. People who are downright evil glow red. Lots of peoples' auras are somewhere in between, and your aura's color can change based on your actions, like when the Great Red Rat of Demonicus saved a whole bunch of elves, turned yellow, and was chased out of the ancient Rat Pack.

profoundinoaktown: i'm not saying cecil's all good. i'm saying he's effective. the books are about what cecil wants and gets. that's the definition of a protagonist. i should know. last week we studied them in my literature class

PureGreenElvenGrl: Well, you sure didn't pay attention when they taught spelling. It's protagOnist.

profoundinoaktown: whatever. you know i'm Deaf. english is my 2nd language. come back to me when you can sign protagOnist

SwordWielder42: Wow. I didn't know you were deaf. That's cool.

PureGreenElvenGrl: Then you must never have been in a conversation with Profound before. He mentions it every chance he gets. Also, he lives in Oakland, California, and he's black.

SwordWielder42: So? I'm Black too.

PureGreenElvenGrl: Nothing. It's fine. He just brings it up a lot.

profoundinoaktown: it better be fine. and yeah i bring it up a lot. being Deaf, Black + Oaktownner is who i am and i'm hecka proud of all 3

SwordWielder42: Yeah man. Black pride. But I never heard of anyone being proud of being hard of hearing before.

profoundinoaktown: Deaf, dude, Deaf. #DeafPride
#DeafPower

PureGreenElvenGrl: This isn't twitter. You can't hashtag stuff.

profoundinoaktown: i have powers you don't know

BADisGreat: so who's your favorite character, SwordWielder?

SwordWielder42: Who me? Gotta either be Verdi-Toh or Gwenella.

JillyinP: YES!

SwordWielder42: What?

BADisGreat: She's just happy because Gwenella's her fave too

JillyinP: Gwenella is so going to be the first half troll ever to glow full green

profoundinoaktown: never happen

Profound is like that sometimes, a bit of a downer. Most of the time he's pretty cool, though.

BADisGreat: so, J, any word on the baby sister?

JillyinP: Not yet. But if she doesn't come soon, my mom might topple right over onto her stomach.

PureGreenElvenGrl: babies are SO cute!!!

profoundinoaktown: have you ever lived with a baby?

PureGreenElvenGrl: I'm an only child.

profoundinoaktown: let me tell you. they might seem cute, until you get one. then you realize they just look like that so you won't toss them off a cliff. trust me. i have 2 little sisters

SwordWielder42: So twice as bad?

profoundinoaktown: more like 8 times. and you have it worse than me

JillyinP: what do you mean?

profoundinoaktown: babies cry all the time, even at night. i take out my hearing aids when i sleep but you can't take off your ears

JillyinP: well, I'm excited to have a little sister. Anything's better than a pregnant mom.

That's when Dad knocks on the door and tells me to log off and get my homework done.

Sometimes I wish I could live in Vidalia, and not just because they don't have language arts homework. It must be nice to know who to trust. Like, if someone tells you in advance that your mom being pregnant is no big deal, you

would just need a glimpse of their aura turning yellow to know that they were flat-out lying.

Just like Mom is still flat out on the couch. She skips dinner entirely. She ate a late lunch and her stomach isn't feeling great, so it's just Dad, me, and a tray of ziti at the dinner table, looking at each other, wondering when my baby sister will decide it's time to vacate Mom's body.