



Can?t Look Away

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Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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Torrey Grey is a 15-year-old fashionista. She has her own channel on YouTube giving advice to teenagers on fashion and beauty, with the online identity of Beautystarz 15.

Torrey and her parents have just moved home from Boulder, Colorado, to Texas ? which displeases Torrey. They are moving to be near her father?s Texan family after Torrey?s younger sister Miranda was killed by a drunken driver.

In the aftermath of this disaster Torrey gets a great deal of support from her online community but there are a few instances too of unsympathetic troll-like comments. Because of the circumstances in which her sister died, Torrey is beset with guilt and unable to come to terms with the bereavement. For these reasons her online work comes to an abrupt halt ? she has fallen silent.

The remainder of the novel deals with Torrey?s attempt to reconcile herself with what has happened, and to find help.

For many adults the online world so often inhabited by children and young adults is an unknown land; they just don?t get it. Cooner does. She makes vividly clear the extent to which the internet can become the dominant world of a young person. By so doing she provides a useful guide to adults and establishes an intuitive link to younger readers who know what this world is about, without becoming didactic or patronising in the process. This is a serious accomplishment.

The author has, however, committed herself to a problematic schema for the book. The reader will expect events ? a violent death, a family in flight ? to stir the book?s protagonist at a deeper level. But for much of the book Torrey seems not to possess a deeper level, or more precisely when she manifests one it is revealed painfully slowly. She judges everyone by their attire or accessories ? shoes, clothes, handbags, makeup, hairdo and so forth; all the externals. By the time Torrey shows any more profound feelings, there is a danger that the reader?s sympathy will have flagged.

Many readers may have encountered a fashion-obsessed girl like this at school, and heartily disliked her. The superficial nature of almost all Torrey?s value judgements may prove an obstacle to readers? enjoyment of a very good book that could have been an even better one.

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