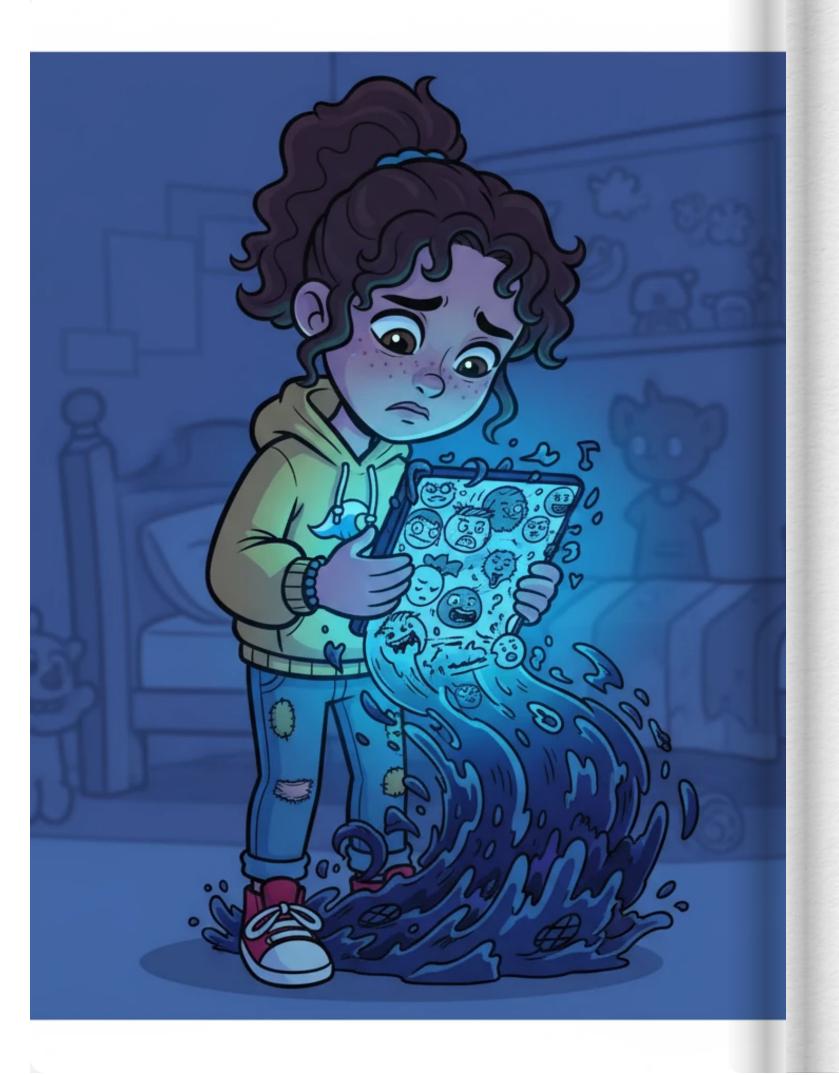# The Echo Chamber

by Mona

Rain lashed against the window, blurring the city lights into streaks of gold. Emma Hayes, hunched over her phone, felt the blue light illuminate her face in a cold, stark glow. The screen displayed a heart emoji next to two names, the digital spark that had set the school ablaze.
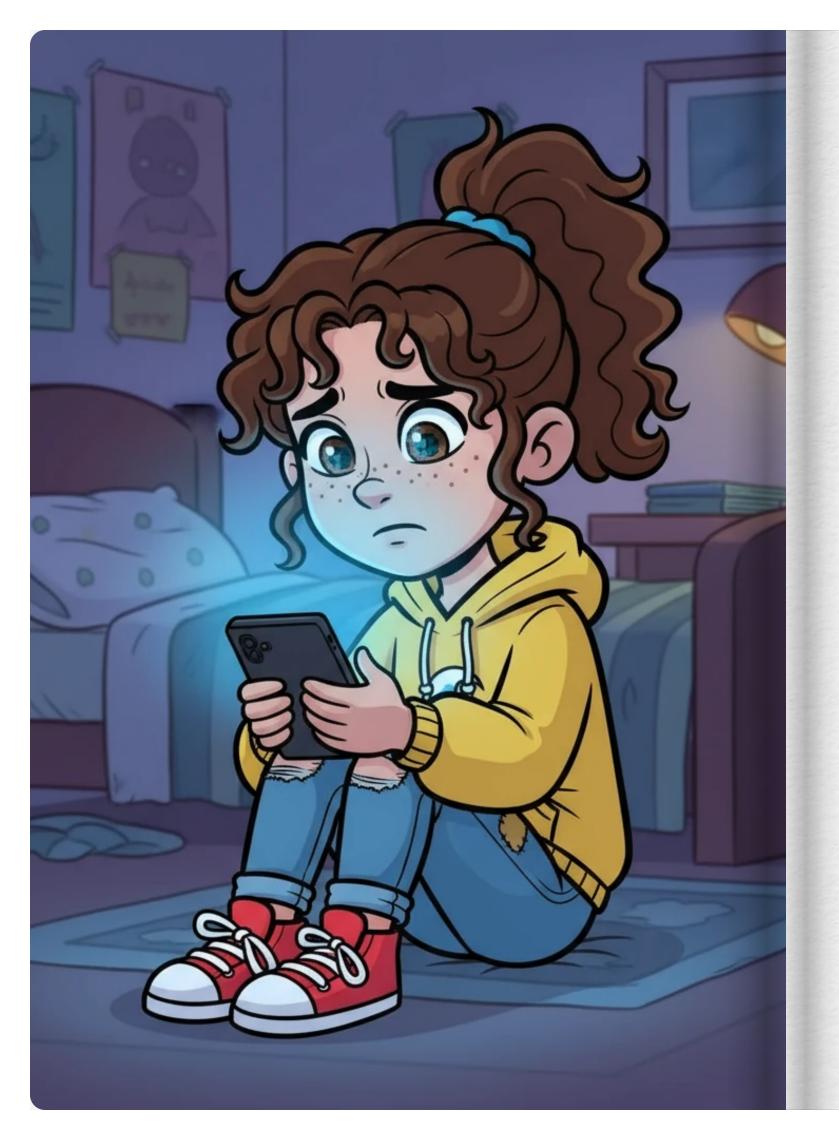
The whispers started subtly, weaving through the hallways like a noxious gas. Emma remembered the subtle shift in the air, the way heads turned and conversations hushed when she walked by. The air in the school felt thick with unspoken words and judging eyes.

The cafeteria was a cacophony of noise and judgment. Laughter and whispers mingled, creating an atmosphere of tension. Emma recalled the sting of last year's betrayal, the feeling of trust shattered into a million pieces.

The digital tide swelled, flooding her phone with accusations and cruelty. Pictures and captions were designed to hurt and humiliate, and Emma could feel the weight of every click and comment. The phone felt like a physical burden in her hand.

Emma pictured the two students at the heart of the rumor, walking the halls, unaware of the storm brewing around them. She imagined their faces as they read the posts, alone in their rooms, the cold light of the screen reflecting in their eyes. A knot tightened in her stomach.

A notification blinked on Emma's screen, a siren song of gossip. She paused, remembering her own impulse to consume, to participate. This time, she hesitated, imagining a world where kindness prevailed. She set her phone down, the cool weight of possibility settling on her chest. by Mona Badawieh