

# Amelie August

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August turned eighteen on July 13, 2019. Consequently, his dad decided this was the perfect day to officially end the passenger seat parenting he had been providing for the first seventeen years. “Passenger seat parenting” was the term August used as he informed Amelie of his situation. Amelie assumed the metaphor came from the fact they were sitting in his truck. August rolled down the windows, finally realizing how terrible the fruity smoke was getting. Amelie did not smoke anything. Today, Amelie graduated high school a year early. That’s why she was sitting in the passenger seat of his truck outside the Parker’s gas station while her graduation party was already an hour into effect.

Amelie had spent her senior year at the top. Top grades, top friends, and accepted into her top schools. This time last year, at the beginning of summer, Amelie had worried her final year of school would be miserable since August had graduated the year before. He didn’t walk at graduation, and after they mailed his diploma he tossed it out with his other school notebooks. Without August at school, it seemed more people were willing to invite her to parties and sit with her in class. It gave her the confidence she needed to go to school in another state.

Still, she wished August wouldn’t stay in their hometown. He had been hired at several jobs around town and also let go at several jobs. It wasn’t as if that could be keeping him around the same three roads. All he did was yell about finally being away from his family. His dad might have beat him to it, but whatever push Amelie initially thought that would give August didn’t exist. Amelie knew she should just sit in his

passenger seat, let him play the country radio station as loud as he wanted, and enjoy this time together.

Since he graduated a year ago, Amelie had barely seen him in school during the day and he was at work at night. Their houses were only separated by a small creek, tiny hills with overgrown grass and a few trees that barely equated to “woods,” but in the past year the walk to August’s place had felt a lot longer. The walk had felt like it had when they were children: miles and miles and miles.

Now, the school year was over, and the closeness Amelie had hoped for had returned. After the graduation ceremony ended, August had shown up, and Amelie quickly jumped into the truck before her mother noticed her. He said he’d drive her home the long way. In Vidalia, Georgia there aren’t any true long ways, just circles you drive in until you’re ready to be where you’re going. Along the way, Amelie pointed out August was low on gas. He pulled into the gas station and Amelie ran inside. Amelie had just turned eighteen and it was still legal at this time for her to purchase the nicotine device of her choice. August was always blowing gummy bear or watermelon smoke in her face. She thought she ought to have one of her own.

“You don’t smoke,” August said after she hoisted herself up into his truck again.

“I tried it once, at a party a few months ago.”

“You liked it?” he said, as he took a hit of the new vape first, and handed it back to Amelie.

Amelie took a hit and coughed as soon as the smoke hit her throat. “No, actually.”

They fell into comfortable laughter, an easy and familiar cadence of friendship. “Have you started packing for school?”

“I haven’t completely decided between UGA and Ole Miss,” she said. “Honestly, I thought about taking a year off like you did. You’ll be gone for that year, though, since you’re going back in the fall.”

“I’m not going,” he said quietly and took another hit. And another.

“What? Why not? You said it was only a gap year and the year is up.”

“I can go back whenever.”

“What about money, and a career and...”

“Amelie, you sound like my mom. She never went to college but she hasn’t spoken to me since I told her I wasn’t going.”

Amelie fell silent and stared out the open window. They had been parked for nearly an hour now and all of a sudden Amelie felt confined to the space. She thought if she didn’t leave now, she’d end up stuck there forever.

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Amelie grew up in a little yellow house. When someone walked inside, they were directly facing their reflection in a mirror trimmed in gold. To the left was a narrow hallway, and to the right was the quaint family room. It was a bare family room, just one couch, a tv, and a white rug covering the hardwood floors. The walls in both the hallway and family room were an ugly preschool classroom shade of blue. Amelie’s father had chosen the color before he left when she was ten. Just a nice sort of parting gift.

In front of the mirror was Amelie’s favorite and least favorite spot to stand in the entire house. The mirror had been her grandmother’s, and her grandmother’s

grandmother's. It had been around longer than Amelie had. Amelie knew one day it would hang up in her home. It was an odd heirloom, but it was trimmed in real gold and was thus a sign that, at one point, the women in Amelie's history had married well. *That* tradition hasn't been upheld, Amelie always thought when she was primping before leaving to go anywhere.

The first time Amelie met August was just before her father had left, before she could see her entire face in the mirror. Her mother had held her up to the mirror right before the charity party began and told her not to mess up the braids in her hair.

Amelie's birthday was the next day—double digits. Amelie told every partygoer who would listen that tomorrow she was going to turn ten, and ten was double digits. The one reaction that stuck, the one she would inevitably turn over and over in her head with a little smile for years, was from a little boy about her age. She hadn't noticed boys before, being only nine. Maybe if August hadn't been her first encounter with a boy, and maybe if her mother had placed value on her mind rather than her body, and maybe if her father hadn't left a week later, and maybe, maybe, maybe, the details of the story would have shaken out differently in the narrative. But they did not.

"My birthday's tomorrow. I'm turning ten, double digits!"

The little boy only shrugged. "I'm eleven, that's twin double digits."

Amelie decided she did not like this little boy. She turned on her heels and began stomping away.

"You look very cute," the boy said quickly. Amelie was drawn back.

"Cute?"

"I like your hair. It's yellow like the flowers in my mama's garden."

“What kind of yellow flowers?”

“Dandelions.”

Amelie scrunched up her nose. She knew about dandelions; more specifically, she knew her mother always complained about them growing in her own garden.

“Dandelions are weeds.”

“I like ‘em still,” August shrugged again. Amelie was puzzled by him. His words were so few and his reactions so small. Amelie’s mother told her she reacted too much and too grandly. *Everything is not a plot, Amelie. Eat your carrots.* Amelie did not like carrots.

“They’re wildflowers,” Amelie said. She wasn’t sure what else to say. She had read in a book that they are wildflowers except when they grow in your yard, and then people say they’re weeds. *The unloved flower*, the book had said.

“Wild like your curls,” August said, extending his metaphor.

“I like dandelions, too,” Amelie said.

“You’re as pretty as one.”

Amelie did not know why her cheeks felt so hot suddenly, but she thought it must have been a fever or a grave illness. Her mother was always talking about hot flashes. Maybe she had what her mother had. In any case she did not want this little boy to see her face all red. What if he did not smile when he looked at her again? Amelie hiked up her dress with such haste she thought it might rip and ran away.

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Amelie sat in August's front passenger seat with the window down and her hair flying the entire drive home. The dirt back roads were dusty, but she didn't care. She let the dirt hit her face, not knowing how much she'd miss this in only a few months. She watched the Georgia sky fight over night and day. The moon was always out too early and the sun was turning the sky a variety of shades of pink. August looked over at her as they pulled into her driveway. Her mother was standing on the porch with a glass of red wine. Her foot was steadily tapping. The guests were gone.

"She's angry," August said.

"You're very observant," Amelie replied.

"We could make a run for it."

"I think she'll know where to find us, August," Amelie said and then gestured vaguely to his house next door. At night, when August forgot to shut his blinds and turn off the lights, Amelie could see directly in from her own bedroom. Usually, in these instances, a girl was over in his bedroom. Amelie wondered if he knew, if it was intentional.

"I didn't say we'd run to my *house*."

"Where would we go?"

August raised his eyebrow and his lips did that thing that made Amelie's stomach twist and flutter all at once. Butterflies, murderous ones. Without any further warning August reversed his truck with a loud screech and drove so quickly out of Amelie's driveway that she knew it had left a scuff mark. She knew she'd have to hear about it later, but right now she didn't care.

August drove them behind his house where the woods continued. Often, growing up, August and Amelie played in the small set of woods halfway between their houses. Those trees had a creek right in front of them that they'd always wash off in before going back home. The woods directly behind August's house were different. They were off-limits to Amelie. Not for any reason, just that they always seemed a little too far for her to wander as a child. Then Amelie and August grew up and they didn't play in woods anymore, near or far.

"What are we doing here? The streetlights are on, August. We shouldn't be back here."

"The streetlight rule? Are we ten years old again?" August said, laughing. He reached behind him and grabbed her hand to help her over an oak tree root. Many times August and Amelie both had stumbled over the large roots that rose from the ground to trip little kids.

"It feels relevant suddenly."

"We're fine, I promise."

"Do you take all the girls back here at night?" Amelie laughed. She had been joking, but then August stopped and turned to face her.

"I've never brought you back here."

Amelie wasn't sure if that was flirtatious or mean but her cheeks turned bright red all the same.

"You're blushing, Amelie."

"It's anger."

“It’s not.” He took a step closer. He put his hand on her cheek, bringing her face closer.

“What are you doing?” Amelie asked. Apparently, she was full of questions tonight.

“Can I kiss you, Amelie?”

“Kiss me?”

Amelie had meant it as a question, but her voice had sounded like a challenge, like she was commanding him to finally, *finally*, kiss her. And he did. August kissed her under the giant oak tree until they tripped against the trunk. Amelie had never kissed anyone like this before.

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Amelie was a freshman in high school when she went on her first date alone with a boy. August came knocking on her door one day. Amelie saw him through the mirror’s reflection. She wiped at the mascara that had fallen under her eye, sighed and walked over to the door.

“Hi darlin’,” August said, already removing his boots and setting them by the door. “Hi August, I didn’t know you were stopping by today?”

“I was fixin’ to head over to the arts and crafts booths at the Onion Festival, but Marybeth called and canceled our date, so I figured I’d come over and see if you’d wanna go.”

“As much as I love stepping in every time another girl cancels their date with you, I can’t. I already have a date.”

“You’re lying.”



“I get asked out.”

“Well, yeah, but you never go.”

Amelie shrugged and walked back over to the mirror. It was true she had been asked out plenty of times, and she had never actually gone on a date. Amelie thought if she went on a date, she'd have to kiss the person she was with. And since she hadn't ever kissed anyone, she refused to go on any dates. *Perfect logic*, she thought.

The only reason she was agreeing to this date today was because he was a nice young man from the church—or so said her mother—and she hoped that meant he wouldn't try to even hold her hand, much less kiss her. All of this was too embarrassing to tell August, though. As close as they were, Amelie still found ways to hide parts of her life she didn't want him to see. August walked over to the mirror and stood behind Amelie. Suddenly, she was blushing. He was too close, but Amelie was all right with it. Softly August said, “please.”

“Amelie, sweetie, are you still home? I need you to stop by the store and grab me....” Her mother paused for a moment. August stepped back. “Hello, August.”

“Ma'am,” he nodded in acknowledgment.

Amelie finally turned away from the mirror and toward her mother who was standing in the hallway.

“Amelie, that lipstick's too dark for your skin. Go put on a more peachy color.”

“I like this shade. It makes my eyes pop.”

“It washes you out. You look like a ghost.”

Amelie went into her bathroom and removed the lipstick, returning with a much tamer peachy-pink shade instead of the red she had been wearing. With that she left for the festival with August but told him she'd be meeting up with her date as soon as they got to the festival and to not stick close by her.

To Amelie's delight and horror, she was the drama of the Onion Festival and subsequently the drama of the summer of the year she was newly fifteen. Also, she had her first kiss. Behind the fun house. It was not fun.

The dust from the ground was kicked up all around them, the red dirt of Georgia had stained her white tennis shoes, and a boy she had only ever watched singing worship songs from a distance had his lips sucking all of the oxygen from her lungs. His name was Dale, and he smelled of warm asphalt.

Apparently, just because a boy sits up front at church with his mama and dad, doesn't mean he won't run the bases on a first date. Amelie decided kissing was far too messy and sort of gross. That didn't matter, of course, after Annie Bradly, who was undyingly in love with Dale saw him push Amelie up against the back of the fun house. In fairness, Amelie was not fond of it either.

But that was that. Amelie was now and forever the slut of the summer. She should've just gone with August to the festival. At least he never tried to kiss her, even though she thought he might before, and even more so she wished he *would*.

August did, however, throw a few good punches at Dale after he found Amelie sobbing on a bench. Reluctantly, she had told him what happened. Amelie wished he would've let things be, since she knew the rumors were already riding the rides at the carnival.

“I’m sorry, Amelie, but what was I supposed to do? Let him get away with taking advantage of you?” August asked once they were back at her house. He was helping her take off her makeup, tears still falling gently down her cheeks. August wiped at the tears between scrubs to her face. All Amelie wanted was those clothes off and the makeup removed.

“Sometimes girls don’t want some grand fight for their honor, August. Sometimes we want a hug and a ride home.”

“Amelie, that guy is a creep. We all know it. Your mother was wrong for thinking he was some sort of saint.”

“Yes, I am aware now, thank you.”

Amelie knew she sounded mean, and she knew everything August had done that day was out of care for her. Right now, Amelie didn’t want care and concern. She wanted to be left alone, or maybe she just wanted him there but not talking. She didn’t know what she wanted anymore.

“I wish I had known that was your date.”

“I know.”

“I’m...I’m just sorry it happened,” August said with a sigh, finally turning away and grabbing his coat. He was across her bedroom with his hand on the door when she finally called his name.

“August. August, thank you.”

He turned and smiled. Amelie ran over and hugged him tighter than she ever had before. Tighter than the time her dad left, tighter than when her mother bought her protein bars instead of a birthday cake, and even tighter than just the other night

when they had spent her first hour as a fifteen-year-old looking at the stars together under that big red oak tree. The night she wished he had just kissed her.

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All summer, Amelie could not stop kissing August. When she wasn't kissing August, she was wondering when she would see him next. She would replay their roaming hands and soft words in her head all day long. Amelie was technically grounded the entire summer as a punishment for the night of her graduation, but she was eighteen now and leaving soon. The wrath she endured from her mother seemed inconsequential to her. She didn't feel the need to save the relationship. So, Amelie snuck out most nights.

August was not unsure about the sorts of things they got up to behind their houses, in one another's beds, and in the bed of his truck. In fact, he confessed, any time he had been with someone else, a small part of him always wished it was with Amelie.

Amelie was completely new to sex and everything it entailed. Whenever things happened, Amelie figured it would be because she and August were dating. It didn't seem like rocking the truck and never actually driving out to a movie or dinner was dating, though. Amelie didn't care. She had August and August had sex with Amelie, and it was all perfectly fine and normal. Finally, Amelie was doing what the town had accused her of doing for years.

One night under a tree, Amelie was wearing his shirt and he was wearing just a sweatshirt and jeans. Her hair was littered with leaves and his shirt was stained with

dirt. Her skin was bitten up from the bugs around her and he teased her about the sunburn across her nose and the freckles that appeared only in mid-July.

“August?”

“Yeah, darlin’?”

“Are you sure you won’t go back to school? UGA takes spring applications, I heard. We could go together?”

“I don’t know about Athens.”

“Well, that’s why you should go and get an idea,” Amelie teased.

“Amelie.”

“Please, we can take a weekend trip. It’ll be like a date instead of just rolling around in mud.” Her tone was meant to sound less bitter, but it failed.

“Why do you wanna leave so bad?”

“What?”

“Aren’t you scared?”

“Scared?”

“Of what’s out there.”

“No. I’m scared of what’s here. The people, my mother, the gossip, and the standards.”

He grabbed the side of her face gently and pulled her into a soft kiss. She tasted his tears before she noticed he was crying. Abruptly, Amelie sat up and pulled away. Over and over she asked what was wrong but all he would say was “nothing” and “I’m fine darlin’” and “you’re fixin’ to do great things”. All these stupid clichés hurled at her in the dark night only made Amelie roll her eyes.

“Really? August, I know it’s scary, but it’s also exciting and fun and....”

“It’s impossible. For me. It’s not an option.”

“School?”

“I don’t have money to just throw around for an education that might not do me any good in the end. Who’s gonna help me? My dad I haven’t spoken to in a year? My mom making a teacher’s salary?”

“There are ways. Like the HOPE Scholarship or even grants...”

“Drop it, Amelie.”

“But you couldn’t wait to leave Vidalia. You couldn’t wait to get away, and now you could. You could come with me and we...”

“We?” August said quietly. *We* wasn’t a question, it was a pronoun. But the way he said it seemed so cruel, like there wasn’t a “we,” like Amelie had lost her virginity in the woods behind his house and he was just entertaining the whole thing until she inevitably left.

“You don’t wanna go to UGA anyways, darlin’.” His tone was sweeter now. Amelie felt her anxieties dissipate.

“How do you know,” she replied, the tears starting. She was still lying on his chest, unable to look up at him now.

“I saw your Ole Miss acceptance letter in your room the other day. It was on your desk.”

“So, that doesn’t mean...”

“Go to Mississippi,” August interrupted her. “You don’t really belong in this place anyways.”

He didn't say why. He didn't say she was too bright, or that she was going places, or anything like that. Amelie felt he meant it more as an insult. She hadn't belonged in her hometown for a while. She hated the easy way the town turned on a broken family, on a family with one daughter who had a reputation like hers. Amelie had never seen a boy without his shirt on up until a few months back when she and August finally did have sex.

Amelie wasn't sure how to reply, so the conversation ended and the grasshoppers were either silent or Amelie's mind was too preoccupied to hear them. They fell asleep like that, under the oak tree. In the morning they both had tear stains and terrible headaches.

Two weeks passed and the two friends didn't talk, both unsure of what was left to say. Agree to disagree was written in their silence. Amelie packed her car. The mirror trimmed in gold was set carefully in a box filled with bubble wrap. Amelie thought about the years she spent obsessed with her appearance. She thought about her mother and father and all the ways she wished they had given her just a little more respect and maybe she wouldn't be sitting waiting for a boy she thought was a friend, then a lover, and who really seemed to just be nothing.

Amelie waited an extra hour for August and finally decided he wasn't coming to say goodbye. She'd find out later he had been held up at his new job as a server because of the lunch rush. In any case, Amelie left the small town.

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Amelie completed her first two years of college. In this time, not only did she not speak to her mother, but she also had not heard from August. All of the "friends"

she made in that last year of high school had slowly fallen away, but in their wake she made new friends. Friends that listened when she said she did not drink and held her when she cried because a new boy had kissed her in a way that reminded her of that terrible first kiss behind the fun house. She did not miss August, and she did not hear any life updates. Amelie had finally decided it was no longer her responsibility to help him grow up.

But August did call her one day. It was a week before her junior year. Amelie had just turned twenty. He said many things on the phone that day.

August apologized for the way things ended between them. He said he hoped she never regretted anything that happened between them, and he talked about their childhood on the creek. Amelie told him about the Soundcloud rapper texting her as they spoke and a frat boy she had finally ditched. Amelie forgave August because he said they couldn't stay away from one another, and Amelie figured he had to be right.

Their friendship was a rocky thing to navigate in the couple of years that followed. Eventually, August admitted he had been in love with her that summer and probably all of the time before that. He said he felt lucky he had gotten to be *with* her, but he did not think she would actually be with him in a real, honest-to-god relationship way. Amelie had laughed for a good five minutes at that, because in her mind she had always pushed him to commit and admit he was in love with her. At first, it was funny and a little exciting to think about him pining away for her all these years in the same way she had.



In the next breath, Amelie's giddiness was crushed, and whenever she thought about it now, Amelie still couldn't fully understand August in that moment. The boy she swore she knew more than her own reflection.

"I've met someone, darlin'. I'm gonna propose soon."

"Propose what?" Amelie said, blinking several times. She was standing up now, and she was face to face with her reflection. Her eyes were too red from lack of sleep, and her stomach was bloated from nights at the bars.

"Marriage, Amelie. I want you to meet her beforehand, though. You think you could make it here anytime soon? I think y'all would be real good friends."

"You're only twenty-one."

"Twenty-two, remember."

"Oh, of course, right. That is very different."

"Please, Amelie."

Amelie found herself in the passenger side of his truck a week later. He was chattering on about Caroline. He went into details she could not stand to know. Her favorite color was red, and she snorted when she laughed. They met out on the lake, While they were both fishing. August had never mentioned fishing before.

Finally, they made it to her house. He had picked her up from school and everything. She knocked on her front door, and her mother squealed at the sight of her. Amelie wondered if her mother realized that years had passed since the last time they spoke. Amelie wondered if August realized he had confessed his love and, in the next breath, informed her about his impending marriage. Amelie wondered if her stomach still looked bloated from shots of vodka.

“Hi sweetie! Oh, I missed you. Tell me all about school...” Amelie’s mother droned on to herself. Amelie turned to August who hadn’t even walked inside yet. He mumbled something about picking her up later for dinner. Amelie nodded in agreement and waved goodbye. She had five hours with her mother and two years’ worth of information her mother could try and pry out of her. Amelie pulled the compact mirror from her backpack and blotched at the concealer under her eyes. She blinked back the tears she felt creeping up.

“Have you heard August is in love? I heard him talking about marriage the other day at the bar down the road. Course, it’s silly to be in the bar when you got an almost fiancée at home, but I guess he does still live just beyond the creek. Never did leave, never will now.” Amelie shook her head and told her mom that’s why she was here, to meet the fiancée.

Five hours later, August returned. He was standing at her doorstep with a handful of wildflowers. He placed them behind her ear and Amelie hated herself for the blush that rose on her cheeks. She moved to leave but August stopped her.

“Can I come in?”

She nodded. His hands were jittery.

“August, you alright?”

“I have to ask you something.”

Amelie just stared at him.

“Can I run it by you?”

“What?”

“My proposal?”

“For Caroline.”

“Yes.” It hadn’t been a question. More of a realization.

“August—”

“Please,” he begged. She agreed.

“Amelie, uh, Caroline....” From there he gave a speech so personal to their relationship Amelie couldn’t possibly comment on or critique any of it. He pulled out the ring box and opened it. August reached for Amelie’s hand.

“You two are the same size about. Can I make sure it’s the right size?”

August went to dinner without Amelie. Amelie did not speak to August ever again. When she returned to school all of the rage finally boiled over and she smashed the mirror trimmed in gold.