

January 31, 2023

To the only author who managed to open my heart by page thirty-three,

Ashley Schumacher:

There is no formal greeting I can write to you that will compare to any of the words you have given me. Sure, I could say *hello*, or, *I am writing to you because . . .*

But neither of those greetings, or anything close to them, are good enough for you to experience. Because, Ashley, your writing is a gift; your words are a torrent of powerful love and churning anguish; your stories have welcomed me with open arms and given me exactly what I needed.

*Amelia Unabridged*. A few months ago, I read that title and admired the cover. And I did what I usually do: I judged the book by both its cover and its title. But what I *wasn't* doing was truly taking in the meaning of that word. *Unabridged*.

Time passed. I let the book sit there.

When I eventually came around and picked it up from its spot in the library bag, and when I flipped it open and read the first page, I found myself reading more. And more. And more.

I took the first peek into Amelia's life, her story. I watched as you, Ashley, built up her shadows and her world and her walls so I could watch them all fall.

And then Jenna died.

You wrote a character into my heart and then carved her out, and only within the first two chapters.

Never have I cried for a character right smack at the beginning of a book. But that day I did.

I cried because as I read, I realized just how desperately I wanted a Jenna in my life. And now she was gone. Just like that, within the snap of a finger, within the crack of lighting.

Now, I know the love between Amelia and Nolan grew strong through the progress of the story, and that's not something I should dismiss, but that's exactly what I'm going to do. Because the love between Amelia and Jenna was even stronger.

The word *love* is a funny thing. It's so powerful, yet everyone both misunderstands and misuses it. Most people don't even realize the sheer amount of types of love there are to be sought and discovered. Through this book, you showed me the exact kind of love I've always longed for, but have never truly gotten. It's also the kind that I will never, in the entirety of my

following future, *ever* attain. Even if I did find that love, it would never stay with me, and this is solely because love does not come without loss.

My whole life, I have never truly understood what it means to have a friend. Or, at least, I never *wanted* to understand it. And thankfully I wasn't *too* stupid – I knew instinctually that friendship is a two-sided relationship. See, I had a different kind of confusion. I still do.

My view of friendship was this: everything *must* be perfect. This person should never try to hurt you. They should align with you in every way, they should always want to be with you; they can be friends with other people, sure, but the world revolves around you two, and the both of you only. They should love you just as much as you love them, with absolutely no question.

I grew out of that attitude.

For the most part.

It's such a stupid, tiny struggle that I've found to be an overtaking problem all my life. Still, today, I have too high of expectations for the people around me, and the result is always my own pathetic, abridged downfall.

This is why Jenna is so important to me. She was exactly what I needed, exactly what I imagined I could once have.

And then when she died, the absolute realization hit me like a tsunami:

I will never have exactly what I need; things will never be the exact way that I need them to be.

The friend of both Amelia and the friend of my dreams was dead, so I cried. I cried not only because Amelia lost her Jenna, but also because this loss reminded me that even if I ever do find my Jenna, she will never be able to stay. I ached and I curled and I sobbed because I knew then that I will never have what I want, what I feel I *need*, and it's all because of me.

I am the way I am, and I will never change for anyone other than myself. And that is why I can never have a Jenna.

But . . . out of the many things your book did for me, Ashley, most of all it reminded me not just of what I need to be conscious of for myself. It also reminded me of the inevitable fact that love is a three-dimensional thing. It's not just a word. Not just a feeling. It's a universe of endless possibilities, both upright and inside-out and everything else. Love cannot prevail without the loss of those most loved.

So, thank you, Ashley, for the unforgettable characters, the uprooting story. Thank you for shaping my shadows around Amelia's own darkness; thank you for building up my true self, for making it so overbearing that there was nothing more for me to do but *see* her and give her some of that love I've always longed for.

For everything you've done, every unabridged world you have crafted just for me . . . Even the Jenna I can never have . . .

You have my utmost gratitude.