



Eighteen

Jenny Jaeckel

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In Jenny Jaeckel's coming-of-age novel *Eighteen* a free-spirited young woman heads for college and falls in love for the first time.

Talia grew up all over, moving from commune to commune with her unconventional parents. In 1990, she heads to Olympia to start college. She's an artistic person, interested in film, dance, and art. But she's also only eighteen, and a tad naïve. Talia, who's insecure about her lack of life experience, is especially sensitive to the fact that she's yet to be "deflowered." She blisters when her friend teases her about it.

After a couple of fortuitous run-ins on campus, Talia starts a relationship with a local carpenter, George. Both are quiet and serious people, and their relationship intensifies fast. Though they've fallen hard for each other, George has to leave for a job in Mexico for several months; their new love is tested.

Talia's point-of-view dominates, led by descriptive imagery and apt metaphors. Her anxieties are "bees in her stomach," growing agitated and buzzing with fury throughout the book. When she's embarrassed, her "face bursts into flames"; when George leaves, her heart is "sliced in two." The result is a beautiful, realistic exploration of young adulthood.

George and Talia's relationship is the novel's central focus, and it shapes the reigning poetic and romantic tone. They tell each other that they love each other for the first time on a rowboat, as the water literally sparkles blue from phosphorescence. Talia wears a necklace knotted by George and keeps a heart-shaped stone gifted to her from him under her pillow. Throughout the novel, there are also love letters, passionate lovemaking, and a grand romantic gesture, helping to make *Eighteen* is a tender exploration of young love.

JENNA JAUREGUY (January / February 2022)

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