

Dear Reader,

My novels take shape around a setting. Whatever happens to the characters will grow out of this soil. In *Heartwood*, the setting is the witchy, moss-dark woods of Maine, where, at the end of her Appalachian Trail hike, my protagonist gets mysteriously lost. Back in 2013, an older AT hiker had gotten lost in this spot, losing her life, and the idea of this woman waiting for rescue never left my mind. My own feeling of lostness kicked in during the pandemic, when my days were filled with longing for community and safe harbor, and I began to write this book in earnest. I also started to memorize birdsong. I got good enough that I could tell the sparrows apart. Turns out, the sparrows did perfectly well during the pandemic, singing their hearts out all morning long, teaching me a thing or two.

I am not a brave woman. But I am good at following brave people around and asking them questions. In order to create the character of Beverly, a Maine Game warden who leads the search for the lost hiker, I went on “ride-alongs” with two of the wardens. One was a young woman who loved her “toys”—she meant snowmobiles and boats. Mostly I just listened to her, as we drove the backcountry roads. Both wardens told stories of the traumas they carry around as first responders. Writing this book reconnected me to others after the pandemic—not just the wardens and hikers, but to you—the eventual reader. The reader is my real addressee, my “beloved,” on the other end of every novel-letter. It felt like the right time to tell you a story about being lost and found.

Thank you with all my heart for reading this book.

*Amity*

**NOMINATE FOR INDIE NEXT | Deadline is January 27**

**HEARTWOOD by Amity Gaige**

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