

# Influential

AMARA SAGE

faber

First published in the UK in 2023  
by Faber & Faber Limited  
Bloomsbury House, 74–77 Great Russell Street  
London, WC1B 3DA  
faber.co.uk

Typeset by MRules  
Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CRO 4YY

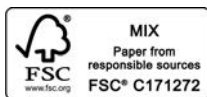
All rights reserved  
© Amara Sage, 2023

The right of Amara Sage to be identified as author  
of this work has been asserted in accordance with  
Section 77 of the Copyrights, Designs and Patents Act 1988

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of  
trade or otherwise, be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise circulated without  
the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that  
in which it is published and without a similar condition including  
this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser

A CIP record for this book  
is available from the British Library

ISBN 978–0–571– 37734–3



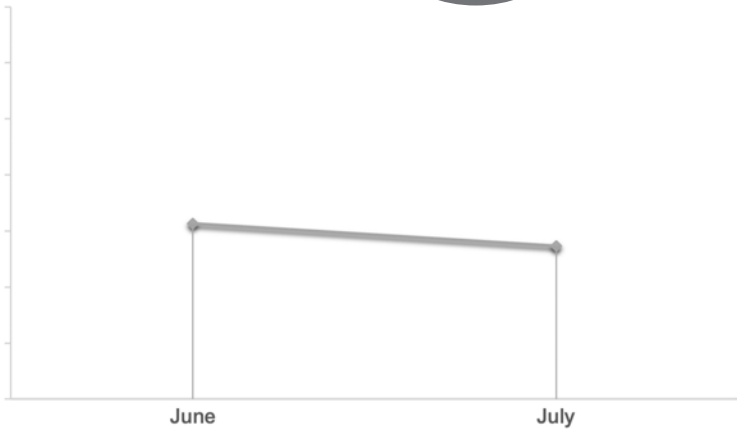
Printed and bound in the UK on FSC paper in line with our continuing  
commitment to ethical business practices, sustainability and the environment.  
**For further information see [faber.co.uk/environmental-policy](http://faber.co.uk/environmental-policy)**

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

For Connie & Lesley,  
I did it! Thank you for always telling me I could.  
I love you and miss you dearly.

# July

-2,019  
Followers



# 1

**thereal\_almondbrown**

**1079**

**3.5M**

**98**

Posts

Followers

Following

## **ALMOND BROWN**

Public Figure

Vegan living | Cruelty-free beauty

Contact: [Spencer@bigstarpr.com](mailto:Spencer@bigstarpr.com)

Follow [@evfairchild](#) for more

I go to Settings. Account. Delete my profile.

When the end credits for *Unsolved Mysteries* are done rolling,

Netflix asks me if I'm still watching. I sigh, my breath shuddery from crying. The question seems passive aggressive, or maybe Netflix is just reflecting my own self-judgement back at me because *I know* it's bad that I've spent the entire week since school ended in bed, alone, bingeing shows. That I've woken up, written off the day, and decided to pick up right where I left off last night.

The black screen shows my reflection: low-angled, double-chinned, matted curls piled on top of my head. My brown skin that would usually be naturally sun-glowed a darker shade this far into July looks blotchy and blanched from staying inside.

Every atom of me looks entirely different to the girl in the first photo at the top of my Instagram, angelically smiling out from a spotlit vanity mirror, poised with the pads of her fingers massaging a pea-sized pearl of cream into her face, her chin up, hair falling in perfect ringlets down her back. Next to her is Eve Fairchild – or Mum, as I call her – roller-balling moisture across her forehead, one hand daintily reaching for the product in centre focus, its VeGlow label face out. The direction was 'mother-daughter pamper sesh', though I felt the farthest thing from relaxed.

When we came home from that two-day shoot in London, Dad had finally moved all his stuff out, taking Honey with him. Mum must've known because she'd had the house cleaned, the stinging smell of bleach stripping away the sniffs of my dog that clung between the sofa cushions, her hairs wiped clean from the skirting boards.

Everything shit seemed to happen at once. With Dad leaving and school ending, taking the pretence of any friendships I had left

with it, I just haven't been able to post anything since. I can't be pushing vitamin-D supplements when I haven't absorbed a single milligram of sun all week, or share my OOTDs when I'm on day six of wearing the same bra and never change out of my pyjamas.

I've hated being an 'influencer' for years, but I could at least grin and bear it when we were simply *bending* the truth of our lives. Now that truth has snapped and shattered into jagged shards of hurt and blame, it's getting harder to catwalk my way over them like Mum expects me to.

I close the lid of the laptop because no, Netflix, I *haven't* been watching. For the last twenty minutes I've been doing this little thing I like to do at least three times a week called having an existential crisis.

I go back to my phone.

Do you want to permanently delete  
thereal\_almondbrown?  
Yes      No

My thumb hovers over the screen, the words a blur, my body heaving with that desperate, gaspy breathing that always comes after the kind of crying that empties your head, leaving an ache at your temples. Since Mum gave up knocking on my door a while ago and I heard her leave for London without me, I sit up, drawing my knees under my chin.

Big day today. Spencer set up a meeting with VeGlow at noon to discuss our product collaboration with them, and then we've been invited to the Skwimmy's launch at five – this new

shapewear/swimwear hybrid brand we've been promoting. I pick at the crusted edge of a scab on my leg, wondering what story Mum'll make up about why I'm missing both.

If I press Yes now and permanently delete my account, I won't be thought of as a prospective business deal ever again. I won't have another ad campaign like VeGlow's to miss meetings for, or followers zizzing like mosquitoes behind the glass screen of my phone, or a launch party with a beachwear dress code to worry about when my skin's torn to shreds. Everywhere bubbling with people and people and people. Strangers who know me by name.

But no ad campaign means no money.

And I have life-alteringly important plans for this money.

I can't stay here while everyone else from school is getting government grants for university courses I didn't qualify for, and proper jobs with HR departments that would advise against hiring me after googling my name. VeGlow's advance is paying for connecting plane tickets to somewhere far, far away from here, to a country outside my demographic where I'll be irrelevant to ad companies. Somewhere hot enough I can breeze about sun-dazed, cocktail in hand, too unwound to care that I don't have a 'next step'. That advance is also paying for my first meal in the departures lounge that I can eat while it's still hot without taking a photo of it first, that I can choose without having to check the carbs, the calories, the saturated fat.

I'd come back home eventually, when the algorithm had churned me out of its memory and even Mum would have to admit



my irrelevancy; I'd have been replaced by one of the thousands of other girls tagging their selfies with #digitalinfluencer or #fitspo, #styleblogger, #midsizefashion.

My eyes flick between the Yes and the No.

But can I wait until the contract's signed? And then however long after till the bank transfer comes through. After Eve&AlmondXVeGlow gets released to the public and I'm thrown into interviews, meet and greets, Q&As, and the endless 'Can I get a selfie with you?'s.

*My God, no, just fucking delete it already, delete everything.*

I sigh, throwing myself back onto the bed, because of course I can't; I'm contractually shackled to my socials for at least another six weeks.

Miserably resigned, I go to the internet, click history.

Today

10:19 Sad songs playlist

10:17 Medically induced coma. optional

10:15 Can you cry yourself to death

10:09 Why can't I stop crying

10:01 Sertraline 100mg side-effects crying

Clear browsing data: last hour

My phone screen dims and I let it.