



May and Amy: A True Story of Family, Forbidden Love, and the Secret Lives of May Gaskell, Her Daughter Amy, and Sir Edward Burne-Jones

Josceline Dimpleby

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A chance encounter at a summer party sent writer Josceline Dimbleby on a quest to uncover a mystery in her family's past. After talking with Andrew Lloyd Webber about a beautiful, dark portrait in his art collection, she decided to find out more about the subject of the painting: her great-aunt Amy Gaskell. Dimbleby had always known her great-aunt's face from this haunted portrait by the well-known Pre-Raphaelite painter Sir Edward Burne-Jones, but beyond that and a family rumor that Amy had died young "of a broken heart," Dimbleby knew little of her female forebears.

At the start of her search, Josceline came across a cache of unpublished letters from Burne-Jones to her great-grandmother May Gaskell, Amy's mother. These letters turned out to be part of a passionate correspondence—adoring, intimate, sometimes up to five letters a day—which continued throughout the last six years of the painter's life. As she read, more and more questions arose: Why did Burne-Jones feel he had to protect May from an overwhelming sadness? What was the deep secret she had confided to him? And what was the tragic truth behind Amy's wayward, wandering life, her strange marriage, and her unexplained early death?

In piecing together the eventful life of her grandmother, Dimbleby takes us through a turbulent period in history that includes the Boer War, the Great War, and the Second World War and visits the most far-flung corners of the British Empire. The Souls—William Morris, Rudyard Kipling, and William Gladstone—all play a part in this sweeping, often funny, and sometimes tragic story. Above all, it is her infectious enthusiasm for a subject so close to home that makes *May and Amy* such a compelling and richly entertaining read.

From the Hardcover edition.

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