



Gwendolen: A Novel

Diana Souhami

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"A bold feat of imagination . . . Intriguing and moving: a fictional recovery of the woman's interior experience . . . and a powerful meditation upon the nature of creativity. Both an arresting interpretation of George Eliot's work and a compelling fiction in its own right." —Rebecca Mead, author of *My Life in Middlemarch*

In an astonishing unsent love letter, a 19th-century Englishwoman looks back at her formative years, when she fell in love with one man but married another—the richest bidder—to save her family

Gwendolen Harleth, an exceptionally beautiful upper-class Englishwoman, is gambling boldly at a resort when she catches the eye of a handsome, pensive gentleman. His gaze unnerves her, and she loses her winnings. The next day, she learns that her widowed mother and younger sisters, for whom she is financially responsible, have lost their family's fortune. As a young woman in the 1860s with only her looks to serve her, Gwendolen's options are few, so when Henleigh Grandcourt, a wealthy aristocrat, proposes to her, she accepts, despite her discovery of an alarming secret about his past.

During their marriage, Grandcourt is psychologically and physically brutal to her, shattering her confidence. Gwendolen begins to encounter the alluring gentleman from the resort—Daniel Deronda—in her social circles, but Grandcourt, cold and calculating, takes pains to isolate her from everything she loves. Gwendolen's desperation nearly overcomes her, until an unexpected turn of events suddenly liberates her from Grandcourt's tyranny and leaves her financially independent. Newly free, but riddled with insecurity and desire, Gwendolen must take painful steps to shape a life that has not gone according to plan. Gwendolen and her world, originally creations of George Eliot, are inhabited and brought to sympathetic and nuanced life in this irresistible debut novel by Diana Souhami, an award-winning British biographer.

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