



# Amherst: A Novel

*William Nicholson*

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## **Amherst: A Novel** William Nicholson

From an Oscar-nominated screenwriter and the author of *Motherland*, a novel about two love affairs set in Amherst—one in the present, one in the past, and both presided over by Emily Dickinson.

Alice Dickinson, a young advertising executive in London, decides to take time off work to research her idea for a screenplay: the true story of the scandalous, adulterous love affair that took place between a young, Amherst college faculty wife, Mabel Loomis Todd, and the college's treasurer, Austin Dickinson, in the 1880s. Austin, twenty-four years Mabel's senior and married, was the brother of the reclusive poet Emily Dickinson, whose house provided the setting for Austin and Mabel's trysts.

Alice travels to Amherst, staying in the house of Nick Crocker, a married English academic in his fifties. As Alice researches Austin and Mabel's story and Emily's role in their affair, she embarks on her own affair with Nick, an affair that, of course, they both know echoes the affair that she's writing about in her screenplay.

Interspersed with Alice's complicated love story is the story of Austin and Mabel, historically accurate and meticulously recreated from their voluminous letters and diaries. Using the poems of Emily Dickinson throughout, *Amherst* is an exploration of the nature of passionate love, its delusions, and its glories. This novel is playful and scholarly, sexy and smart, and reminds us that the games we play when we fall in love have not changed that much over the years.

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