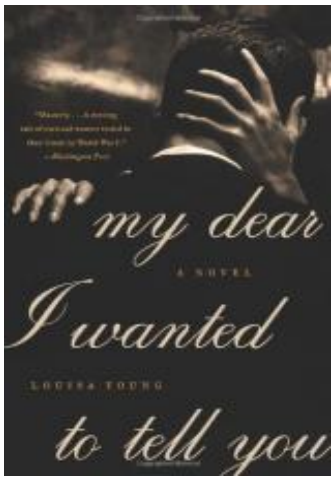
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My Dear I Wanted to Tell You

by Louisa Young



About the Book

The lives of two very different couples are irrevocably intertwined and forever changed in this stunning World War I epic of love and war.

From the day in 1907 that 11-year-old Riley Purefoy meets Nadine Waveney, daughter of a well-known orchestral conductor, he takes in the difference between their two families: his, working-class; hers, "posh" and artistic. Just a few years later, romance and these differences erupt simultaneously with the war in Europe. In a fit of fury and boyish pride, Riley enlists in the army and finds himself involved in the transformative nightmare of the twentieth century.

While Riley and his commanding officer, Peter Locke, fight for their country and their survival in the trenches of Flanders, Peter's lovely and naive wife, Julia, and his cousin Rose eagerly await his return. But the sullen, distant man who arrives home on leave is not the Peter they knew. Worried that her husband is slipping away, Julia is left alone with her fears when Rose joins the nursing corps to work with a pioneering plastic surgeon treating wounded and disfigured soldiers.

Only 18 at the outbreak of the war, Nadine and Riley want to make promises to each other --- but how can they when their future is out of their hands? Youthful passion is on their side, but then their loyalty is tested by terrible injury, and even more so by the necessarily imperfect rehabilitation that follows.

Moving among Ypres, London, and Paris, this emotionally rich and evocative novel is both a powerful exploration of the lasting effects of war on those who fight --- and those who don't --- and a poignant testament to the power of enduring love.

Discussion Guide

1. To what extent does Riley?s class influence his behavior, and the behavior of others throughout the novel?

2. How does Riley?s attitude to the war change as the novel progresses?

3. Do you think the actions of Riley and his reasons for going to war were good ones and do you think society has learnt lessons from the atrocities that occurred, or is it still happening today?

4. Do you think society?s attitude to going to war today (ex: Afghanistan) differs from the attitude at the time of the First World War?

5. ?Julia had learnt to love her own beauty, because beauty was currency, and other people valued it so highly.? Discuss how this view of Julia?s influences her behavior throughout the novel.

6. Compare her experiences of plastic surgery with those of Riley?s. Is feeling ugly on the inside really that different to looking ugly on the outside?

7. ?A girl needs a good reputation, these days more than ever. Art school is for times of peace and plenty, not for unmarried girls in wartime.? Consider this advice that Nadine?s mother gives her. How does this symbolize society?s attitude to women, and does the war change this view in the novel?

8. The title of the novel is taken from a standard-issue field postcard that soldiers had to fill in during the war - Riley fills in one such field postcard. Consider the ways we communicated with our loved ones then compared to now.

Author Bio

Louisa Young grew up in London in the house in which **Peter Pan** was written. She studied modern history at Cambridge and was for many years a freelance journalist, working mostly for the motorcycle press, *Marie Claire*, and the *Guardian*. She lives in London and Italy with her daughter and the composer Robert Lockhart.

Critical Praise

"This novel is a triumph."

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