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From childhood, Susan Gray and her cousin Louisa May Alcott have shared a safe, insular world of outdoor adventures and grand amateur theater -- a world that begins to evaporate with the outbreak of the Civil War. Frustrated with sewing uniforms and wrapping bandages, the two women journey to Washington, D.C.'s Union Hospital to volunteer as nurses. Nothing has prepared them for the horrors of this grueling experience. There they meet the remarkable Clara Barton -- the legendary Angel of the Battlefield -- and she becomes their idol and mentor. Soon one wounded soldier begins to captivate and puzzle them all -- a man who claims to be a blacksmith, but whose appearance and sharp intelligence suggest he might not be who he says he is. Through the Civil War and its chaotic aftermath to the apex of Louisa's fame as the author of *Little Women* and Lincoln's appointment of Clara to the job of finding and naming the war's missing and dead, this novel is ultimately the story of friendship between women -- women who broke the mold society set for them, while still reckoning with betrayal, love, and forgiveness.

The Glory Cloak: A Novel of Louisa May Alcott and Clara Barton Details

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From Reader Review The Glory Cloak: A Novel of Louisa May Alcott and Clara Barton for online ebook

Pinkie says

Thoroughly enjoying

Judy says

Great story premise but the writer just doesn't deliver.
Easy, quick read but don't bother.

Amanda says

I worked my way through this with a sense of suspicion about its research methods. Apparently I'm less willing to give an author license when it comes to more well-known historical figures like Louisa May Alcott and Clara Barton. However, I was pleased to discover that the book does conclude with a discussion of her sources and how fictional and historical elements were blended.

Ruth says

The problem I have with this publication is the marketing. I'm sure this is more the publishers fault than the author but I felt misled. The front cover of the paperback promises a story of Clara Burton and Louisa May Alcott, but it's more the story of LMA's fictitious cousin's dealings with LMA, Clara Burton and a number of Civil War folks. The story was interesting. A number of characters were of interest, too. I did learn something of the character of Louisa and Clara, but the author stressed the work as fiction, so I'm not certain what I garnered from the reading is actual. But still an interesting story well told.

Kerry says

When I was a kid, I went through a phase where all I read were biographies of famous women. Amelia Earhart, Hellen Keller, Molly Pitcher and of course Louisa May Alcott and Clara Barton. I have very strong and fond memories of reading Invincible Louisa in the library of my elementary school. So the thought of reading the Glory Cloak, with its historical fiction take on not one but two of my childhood heros, certainly appealed to me.

For the most part, I think the book works. Adding the fictional character of Susan allowed the author to connect Alcott and Barton and to go back and forth between them as the story progressed.

Using Alcott's novels, letters and family diaries, the author did a fairly decent job in recreating some points in Louisa's life... particularly the Hospital Sketches era where she served as a nurse in the Civil War.

However, I think the author tried too hard to explain why Alcott never married. She depicts Louisa as depressed and emotionally stunted both by a pathological need to provide for the family (since her father was ill equipped to do so) and by her father's disapproval and inability to love her. As a result, in O'Brien's view, Louisa chases after emotionally unavailable men (like Thoreau) and is unable to pursue a man who is willing and able to return her love. The love triangle and resulting betrayal that came out of all this was, in my opinion way too melodramatic and what's more it was just plain unnecessary. But I have decided to consider it a homage to Alcott's sensational "pot-boilers" and move on.

Clara Barton is treated better in the story and I enjoyed reading about her post-war activities since most of what I knew about her focused on her nursing and the founding of the American Red Cross than her efforts to locate the missing and name the dead.

All in all, *The Glory Cloak* was a good book.... a grown up version of the idealized biographies that I read as a girl. I have my doubts as to whether Louisa, herself, would have liked it and there are aspects that I have decided to take with a grain of salt but it was definitely worth my time.

LyndaIn Oregon says

Historical fiction centering on two remarkable American women of the 19th Century -- Louisa May Alcott and Clara Barton.

O'Brien ties the two together with a fictional character, Susan Gray, who accompanies Alcott when she worked as a nurse in Washington, DC, during the Civil War, then later works with Barton in her unflagging efforts to identify the Civil War dead.

Both Alcott and Barton are crisply and believably drawn; however one does wish that somewhere along the way an editor would have picked up O'Brien's confusion between coal and kohl, as it was repeatedly jarring to read how Barton "outlined her eyes with coal".

Misfit says

This was an interesting novel and kept me entertained throughout. I have to admit not being a fan of Alcott, I may have read *Little Women* when I was younger, but I don't recall it. That will be to be on my TBR list for the future.

The story is told in the first person by Alcott's fictional cousin, Susan Gray. She recounts their childhood, family and famous residents of Concord. As adults, the Civil War begins and Mary and Louisa volunteer as nurses in a Washington DC hospital, where they meet the famous nurse and activist Clara Barton, and the mysterious patient John Sulie, who Louisa is strongly attracted to. Do be warned, this was not a pretty war, nor was the aftermath on the wounded soldiers. The author doesn't pull any punches here. The story then shifts to the aftermath of the Civil War, and Clara Barton's mission to account for all the missing and dead soldiers, which the government would prefer to remain unaccounted for. The book finishes with the

remainder of Louisa's life in Concord until her death.

While Susan is a fictional cousin, it was a good way to bring the reader closer to Alcott's inner circle and know her better. Some parts of the story play a little loose with known history, which are acknowledged in the author's notes at the end of the book. All in all an entertaining read, but as I previously noted, I'm not a huge fan of Alcott. Good read, but not one I'm likely to take off the shelf and read again every few years.

Susan Bailey says

The Glory Cloak by Patricia O'Brien is an historical novel featuring Louisa May Alcott and Clara Barton. It covers the Civil War through the eyes of a fictitious Alcott cousin, Susan Gray, who comes to live with the Alcotts after being orphaned. Susan becomes Louisa's constant companion, confidant and critic. Together they volunteer to serve as nurses in the Civil War where they meet Clara Barton; eventually Susan will work with Clara to continue her service in a most extraordinary way.

The Glory Cloak moves so quickly that I could have read it in one sitting if the time had presented itself. It was a blessing at the gym, seeing as I hadn't worked out in three weeks. I was so engrossed in the story that I forgot all about my aches and pains!

The story begins with a 1997 discovery of Clara Barton's office on the third floor of a building in Washington slated to be torn down. This is the office where Barton, with just a handful of volunteers, sought (successfully) to find and identify thousands of missing dead soldiers. This story, based on fact, is crucial to the plot.

Through her made-up characters (Susan Gray, John Sulie (based on the real life character of John Suhre from Hospital Sketches), Belle Poole, Liddy Getty), O'Brien takes the reader deep into the horror of a Civil War hospital inundated with wounded. She also takes us into the minds of her real characters, most especially Louisa May Alcott and Clara Barton.

I have never read anything before on Clara so I cannot judge how realistic her portrayal was in the story. However, my interest was piqued and I plan on finding out more about her.

I do know Louisa fairly well and was intrigued with the theories that O'Brien floated about her throughout the story. I am going to explore those theories in detail on my blog at <http://louisamayalcottismyঃpassion.wor....>

Susan Gray and her family visited the Alcotts for a week or two twice every year. Outspoken and spirited like her cousin, she and Louisa, ten years her senior, became close life-long friends. When Susan's family was wiped out by a typhoid epidemic, she wrote to Louisa, asking to be taken in.

Susan delighted in Louisa's brash and boyish ways. In one scene, the two girls are sitting in an apple tree; Louisa dares Susan to climb to a high branch and hang upside down by her knees. Eager to please though terrified at the thought, Susan complies and is secretly proud of herself for being so audacious.

It was this theme of the "dare" that would be repeated throughout the book.

The title of the book refers to a special real-life cloak made for the Alcott girls for their theatricals. Louisa came to use it whenever she wrote (complete with a hat) and while stories abound as to how it came into her possession, it was Lizzie (aka Beth in this story) who bequeathed the robe to Louisa despite her own fondness of it:

“Beth laughed, removing the wrap. ‘Oh girls, it’s too much for me. Lou, you’re the only one who can wear this and do it justice. You have the flair for it.’

‘No –’ Lou began to protest.

Beth was firm. “It’s your cloak, It’s your glory cloak. You will do wonderful things wearing it, I am sure of it.”

It continued to be Louisa’s costume of choice whenever she would disappear into her vortex of writing.

Susan came to live with the Alcotts shortly after Lizzie had died. Louisa was establishing herself as the breadwinner of the family through her writing, and Susan, wishing also for purpose, used her talents as a hat maker in the local shop in downtown Concord.

Susan noticed immediately how duty-bound and somber her cousin had become. Scarred and yet motivated by all she had lost, Louisa was bound and determined to be the Alcott breadwinner and even tried to discourage Susan from working in the local shop, claiming that the Alcotts were “above” being merchants.

As the Civil War began to rev up, Louisa and Susan became restless, eager to become a real part of the action. Hearing that nurses were needed, they volunteered and set off together on their grand adventure to Washington, D.C. (known as Washington City at the time). They had no idea what they were getting into.

Both sheltered and prim, Susan and Louisa see a much broader view of the world at the Union Hospital. Here O’Brien introduces several colorful characters including the worldly Liddy Getty and the unscrupulous assistant head nurse, Belle Poole.

The Glory Cloak uses Louisa’s Hospital Sketches and greatly expands upon the descriptions of pain, horror and death. Details are gruesome – there is no romanticizing here, especially when the wounded begin streaming in from the disastrous Battle of Fredericksburg.

It is here that we meet the focal point of the novel, John Sulie.

O’Brien describes John as Alcott described him: large, manly, exceedingly handsome. But while Louisa’s description in Hospital Sketches is that of a noble saint, O’Brien’s Sulie is rougher, mysterious and very well-read. Louisa is immediately attracted to him and the feeling is mutual. It begins with discussions of Milton and Whitman (Walt Whitman even makes a cameo appearance) and soon the chemistry between the two is obvious.

However, Louisa is not the only one attracted to Sulie – so is Susan. John Sulie becomes a major test to their friendship.

Eventually Louisa is sent home nearly dying of typhoid and Sulie disappears. Both she and Susan are greatly changed by their “grand adventure” and the deep sorrow that came of it. Louisa loses herself in her writing and Susan seeks greater purpose. Enter (again) Clara Barton.

Clara Barton has achieved a noble reputation for her nursing of the wounded in the field. Now she is obsessed with finding all the missing soldiers.

Susan offers to help but this time Louisa does not follow her cousin. Instead she goes to Europe as a companion to invalid Emma Weld (based on Anna Weld). Duty supersedes adventure for Louisa.

Clara and Susan, along Liddy Getty and Tom Cassidy, a soldier Susan had nursed who was sweet on her, work to answer thousands of letters from distraught families looking for their husbands and sons. Enter again John Sulie who holds the answer.

What follows is a breathtaking series of events (some tragic) that test the mettle of Susan's friendship with Louisa. These events also demonstrate the amazing strength of one woman, Clara Barton, and the astonishing things she was able to accomplish.

I loved this book! I haven't lost myself in a story this much since reading *Gone with The Wind*. *The Glory Cloak* is not nearly so epic, but it is powerful. I am so glad I had read *Gone with the Wind* because *The Glory Cloak* gives a decidedly northern point of view on the war. I found myself thinking of the southern side as presented through Scarlett O'Hara while reading O'Brien's take.

The historical details are fascinating, especially the many references to personal feminine life such as hygiene and the change of life. I had always wondered how women in the 19th century dealt with these issues – now I have an idea.

Susan Gray proved to be a terrific vehicle for getting in the heart, mind and soul of Louisa as well as other members of the Alcott family. It's obvious which members of the family O'Brien found most interesting. Younger sister May was very Amy-like, yet still quite likable. Lizzie was hardly mentioned as if O'Brien didn't know what to do with her. Anna played a small role but was beautifully presented.

O'Brien's contempt for Bronson was palpable – the man could do nothing right! I found her presentation of Abba to be quite curious at first and couldn't really figure out what she thought of her until I reached the end of the book.

If historical fiction is meant to tempt us to find out more then O'Brien did her job well. Clara Barton was very interesting to me. The second half of the book focused on her and what a powerhouse she was! She lived the life of an autonomous, fiercely independent spinster woman with nobility and power. All I can say is, "Wow!"

I appreciated that O'Brien could be provocative without openly poking the reader with jabs (which is what I am finding with Geraldine Brooks' *March*). *The Glory Cloak* showed this newbie writer just how bold one must be to write convincing historical fiction, especially if that fiction is based upon real-life, well-loved characters. O'Brien's theories were backed up with thoughtful, well-executed and believable scenarios. She reinforced what I've long suspected, that one must dig very deep and set the imagination free to succeed at writing something that will carry the reader away and touch the heart. Writing is not for the fainthearted!

Codystanley says

This is the type of book you read when you are looking for a solid story, and one that will also give you a personal connection to the characters. It takes you into the lives of Clara Barton and Louisa May Alcott, and the struggles they went through.

Stacey says

Possible Spoilers

First of all, this is not really the story of Louisa May Alcott or Clara Barton, it is LMA's fictional cousin Susan's story as told through her eyes. That did not have a negative effect on how I liked the story. In fact I thoroughly enjoyed Susan's character and she is the main reason why I gave the book 5 stars, though it's more like 4 1/2.

Susan has spent many a-month during her childhood with the Alcott's. She is more like their 5th sister than cousin. The book starts out showing the Alcott sisters being as lively and fun as the March sisters in Little Women. From the beginning, we see that Louisa and Susan share a close friendship. Time passes and the Civil War has officially begun. Louisa longs for adventure and Susan is only too happy to accompany her to Washington to volunteer as nurses and aid wounded soldiers.

Their time at the hospital opens their eyes to the real world and the two "high bred" ladies from Concord mature very quickly. If you are squeamish you will probably not enjoy reading the numerous descriptions of soldier's wounds. But this was wartime, and this was what it was like for nurses during that time. Thinking back, I'm glad the author included all the gory stuff.

While at the hospital, Louisa falls in love with a soldier who is suspected of being a rebel. As the story progressed I ended up liking this guy very much, although we never really got to know him that well (don't worry, he didn't die in the hospital). Meanwhile Susan, totally devoted to her friendship with Louisa, doesn't even realize that she, too, is in love with John until one fateful night when they share a passionate kiss. John will end up playing a significant part in both their lives.

Clara Barton, the woman famous for her devoted humanitarianism, is also a nurse at the hospital, and the three women become close friends. We see her as the fiercely independent woman she was, a rarity indeed during those times.

There is a lot going on in this book. LMA lived during such a significant time in American history. She was neighbors with Emerson and Thoreau; she and Susan experienced firsthand the truths of a terrible war, and they saw the breakthrough of the women's suffrage movement. The book is well researched and nearly all of the events that take place are fact. We get to understand Louisa *through* Susan, but if you want "The Story of LMA" you won't find it here.

I went into it thinking I'd learn about LMA, and I did, but I came out of it in awe of Susan and all the many things she experienced during this incredible time in history. 4 1/2 out of 5 stars.

Cindy says

3.5 Liked this.

Christina Jones says

Like many girls, I fell in love with Little Women and all the following books written by LMA when I was young. Additionally, I read many biographies of women who helped shape our country. I had great hopes for this story, knowing it was fiction, but hoping there was a real tie between two of my childhood heroes. Unfortunately, this is where the author gets off track. The link between the two women is tenuous at best. LMA was only in DC as a nurse for 6 weeks at the beginning of the Civil War. It would seem more likely that they might have met later as they spoke for women's rights.

However, as a novel, this story was a glimpse into the hospital conditions of the war, the indifference of the politicians to those who had sacrificed so much on both sides, and the home life of LMA and her family's relationships with the Transcendentalists who lived around them. As we broach the sesquicentennial of this war, it is a book that hopefully will whet the appetite to read more non-fiction about this era. While LMA is an interesting personality as an author, Barton is truly a heroine to our country in her efforts to give an identity to the dead of the war, and for the founding of the American Red Cross. It was sad to see her used as just a literary device. She deserves better.

Kellie says

I may have enjoyed this more than I enjoyed Little Women. A great combination of fact and fiction that I found truly entertaining.

Teresa Gibson says

First half of the book: 5 stars. Second half of the book: 3 stars, so it averages out to 4 stars. The good: I really liked how O'Brien wove historical facts into her story, without stepping aside to give the reader a history lecture. She obviously did her research, particularly on Louisa May Alcott, who comes to life in this story. The descriptions of the nurses' lives in the Civil War hospital are taken almost directly from Alcott's *Hospital Sketches*, a very fine book, but *The Glory Cloak* gives the reader an even more real sense of the medical horrors suffered during the war. Alcott seems to be the heroine for the first half of the book, and I read this part eagerly. The second half of the book deals with Clara Barton and her efforts to identify the Civil War dead. This part of the book is less successful. O'Brien does not make Barton as three-dimensional as she does Alcott, and this section of the book sags. I also had a hard time liking the fictional characters in the book: Louisa's cousin Susan and the Union soldier (who is based on two real persons). Much of the dialogue in the second half made me gag--the soldier particularly reminded me of a bad Errol Flynn movie. I highly recommend reading this book up to chapter 12.

Jacki says

I am sort of a sucker for a book about the Civil War, and I grew up infatuated with Louisa May Alcott and Little Women, so I went into this one with pretty high hopes.

I have to tell you, I was not disappointed.

In this book, Susan- a cousin of Louisa May Alcott, moves in with the Alcott family when her parents die. Through Susan's eyes, we see what life is like for the Alcotts. She and Louisa May Alcott decide to go to DC to work in a war hospital, and there is where we meet Clara Barton. It was fun to see other cameos of famous people too- Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau.... at first I thought that this was just a writing ploy, but then I looked it up and it turns out that all these people were buddies. It is not known if Clara Barton and Louisa May Alcott ever came in contact, although they did work at the same war hospital, so it is likely.

I know that I've said this before, but I really think that historical fiction has done its job when you love the story AND are totally intrigued by the history and want to learn more. This book was both of these things for me. The writing was really pretty and flowed nicely. The characters came alive, and I felt like I was in Civil War times.

I thought it was fascinating too, that the prologue really happened. In 1997, a government worker was digging around in an abandoned house, and found a whole floor sealed up with all of Clara Barton's records and her office. This was a whole part of her life that was pretty much unknown until that point. Isn't that amazing?

Anyway, really good stuff. Highly recommended. Read it.
