



Beloved Pilgrim

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The doomed Crusade of 1101 is the backdrop for this story of a young noble woman who questions the values of her day and runs away to fight as a man. She learns along the way that honor and love are not always where you thought you would find them. Also on Smashwords as an ebook.

Beloved Pilgrim Details

Date : Published February 27th 2011 by Shieldwall Books

ISBN : 9780983398509

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Format : Paperback 284 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Lgbt, Glbt, Lesbian, Queer, Fiction

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From Reader Review Beloved Pilgrim for online ebook

Alex Hogan says

Beloved Pilgrim; what a tremendous read. This is not just a 'romance' or 'lesbian story', this is a gritty look at real warfare, and what life was truly like in the Middle Ages, warts and lice and sword slices and all. It has so much in it. It is written by someone who obviously knows the period intimately; you almost feel it is written by someone who has lived through the period. It isn't full of extended descriptions of what each tiny little thing looks like, to remind us that this is set in an "historical time", but is written as if the reader already knows what it looks and feels like, as if the period written of were contemporary to the reader. By doing so we really feel the period, we don't simply see it.

The story is, to put it simply, about a woman, Elisabeth, who pretends to be a man – she dresses up as her twin brother – so she can escape the limited life of a woman, and live the far more adventurous and exciting life of a man, a crusading knight, to be precise. She chooses this life in an attempt to find her father who has not returned from the previous crusade, and by so doing escapes the arranged marriage her father left for her.

But this is no simple adventure story, Biggles in Medieval garb. This is not full of shiny knights in armour, or pretty girls romping in the hay. Once Elisabeth begins her adventure she discovers that men have it tough as well as women. She discovers the horror, disgust, grit and dirt of real warfare. As such the book is showing us that warfare in the Middle Ages is as horrific as it is in the modern world.

Having this twist of the woman pretending to be a man achieves two things. It is an interesting look at how women dealt with the inequities of medieval society, and by analogy how women in non-western societies do the same today. Also, by having a woman in the middle of the awful reality of war, but having that woman dressed as a man, the reader is enabled to look at the scene from a woman's perspective and not the perspective of a medieval soldier. As we are modern readers we can in turn use Elisabeth's different perspective on medieval warfare to allow us to view it from our own modern perspective, and so see the horror of it.

Elisabeth also spends time in foreign parts and has to deal with the difficulties and prejudices of different races and cultures and different classes.

Woven throughout this are two same-sex love stories, or even three, but they do not take over the whole story but are rather part of the story of the life of Elisabeth.

Beloved Pilgrim is a tremendous journey and a very rewarding read, which will stay with you long after you have finished it.

Bethany says

This was a great read if the reader enjoys swords and fair maidens and joining the Crusade of 110. Well, it is a different kind of telling, because the brother of the twins that begin the story dies, and his twin sister takes on the role of Crusader, following her father to the Holy Land. Well, it is also different in that the sister, now

pretending to be her brother, is lesbian and finds a few willing partners along the way. It is only right because the squire that serves her is the same squire that was in love with her brother. Yes, her brother was gay. In fact, there probably were women who went off to war or the crusades, dressed as a man and perhaps some of them even found that their sexual preference was a woman after all. It was a very fun read and interesting to look into how dis-organized the Crusades were and of course with such poor communication how could they have been organized. It also seems that in order to be sheltered and fed the good Christian Crusaders had to burn, rape, and steal in a few villages along the way. War always was and always will be a dirty business, no matter how "smart" the bombs are. Thanks Nan Hawthorne, it was well researched and written. I enjoyed the book.

Trisha Harrington says

My review of Beloved Pilgrim.

Christy English says

In BELOVED PILGRIM, Nan Hawthorne has written a compelling story of a young woman who risks all she knows to become the woman she was born to be. As in the acclaimed novel, POPE JOAN, Elisabeth realizes that in order to claim her true self, she must set out to live her life as a man. Faced with a marriage brokered by her parents for power and convenience, when her twin brother dies, Elisabeth takes on his identity, donning his armor and riding off from her homeland to join the Crusade of 1101.

Followed by her faithful squire, Elisabeth steps into the unknown as she goes in search of her father. Elisabeth realizes that crusading knights are not as pure as one might suppose, and that glory and honor lie not on the field of battle. Elisabeth does find true love in the arms of a Turkish woman, and embraces a new life beyond the strictures she was raised in.

BELOVED PILGRIM is a coming of age story told in beautiful detail, especially of the great city of Constantinople. Nan Hawthorne takes the reader on a journey in which a young woman discovers who she really is.

Erin says

***** NOTE: It has come to my attention that Beloved Pilgrim has been republished. I will not be returning to the piece, but encourage readers to understand the issues I noted may not apply to more recent editions of the novel.**

I am not ashamed to admit I was caught off-guard by the content of this piece. I originally thought the jacket description offered sufficient information on the title's subject matter, but quickly discovered my assumption false. I'd expected a story that explored gender roles and interracial relationships in the Middle Ages, but was surprised that the novel also focused on same-sex relationships. Personally, I couldn't care less one way or the other, medieval fiction is medieval fiction, but there are readers with different opinions and I worry the ambiguity in the description and cover art might backfire unfairly on both author and manuscript.

That said, I liked Hawthorne's enthusiasm and thought the idea to set such a story in a particularly dark and dangerous period rather interesting. There are instances where I felt the attitudes and thinking too modern for the era, but that's just me. This was an age of extremes that didn't offer much in the way of acceptance and while I appreciate where Hawthorne took the story, I often felt the author allowed theme to outweigh the realities of medieval life.

I thought the action sequences, battles and the characters very well-drawn and loved scenes where Elisabeth was faced with real issues like having to function in a suit of armor. The writing wasn't as fluid as I'd have liked, but again that's just me. I'm not sure it would bother anyone else, but there is it just the same.

Not what I expected, but a solid, creative and thought-provoking piece nonetheless.

Cheri says

Nan Hawthorne was our guest on Cocktail Hour to discuss the book and we had a great discussion! You can listen to it here: <http://wp.me/p1d032-1u>.

Julie Bozza says

I enjoyed reading this tale; loved significant parts of it; felt disappointed by other parts. On the whole, I'm very glad I read it, though.

The best part of this book is the description of the Crusade, from when our heroes left home on through the disillusioning realities to the abysmal failure to achieve anything other than a whole lot of death. This is a tale of knighthood and chivalry, and somehow our hero Elisabeth remains the perfect knight despite all, but the novel doesn't shy away from the violence, the deprivation, the harsh conditions, and their effects on her and her companions. Hawthorne got all of that so very right, and included lots of details that proves she knows her stuff.

So it may seem churlish of me to add that other aspects of medieval life, I felt, weren't dealt with as cleverly. I wasn't so convinced by the attitudes early in the book to homosexuality and arranged marriages. They felt a bit too modern, a bit too easy. I would have appreciated the same insights into the medieval mind as seemed provided by the chapters on the Crusade. It must be the hardest thing to do with historical fiction, and I can't claim to manage it myself, but oh how I love it when I find it.

Similarly, I loved Elisabeth's high-flown love for the Margravina, and her rather earthier encounter with Giuliana, but felt a little disappointed by the main love story. I had faith that the fiesty Maliha with her golden lioness eyes and her adorable little son was a great match for Elisabeth - but once the initial difficulties were out of the way, their story proceeded just a little too perfectly.

Overall the novel was well-written, with a subtle engaging style. There were only a few instances of the need for better proofreading. And there was lots to love about it. Which is why I found it so frustrating that it could have been a great novel, and not just a good one.

Kathy says

I loved the whole book. Made me look more into historical history books

Bryn Hammond says

I liked the last 3rd most: it's the tight narrative of a disaster. This works up a terrific head of steam. *Great* fighting (and I've never met such a fighting horse). A true war tale. What's more, because this is a crusade of 'uncertain facts' and the writer has given us a 'yarn' not a history text, you won't know what's going to happen. The last 3rd is five stars; up til then was four.

But back to the beginning. Girl puts on armour, disguises herself as a knight and runs off to the Crusades (or similar). It's an old story. It's my favourite plot in the Faerie Queene: would I be half so fond of Spenser if not for Britomart, who does exactly that? And Spenser imitated from the Italians who have Bradamante and Marfisa. Our Elizabeth/Elias has quite a tradition behind her. The storyline is certainly my fantasy, and that might explain the novel's readability to me. The book was BIG on readability (even before that last third).

Along the way our naive young E. finds herself gobsmacked by women, than which nothing does more to further her disguise. Now, Spenser and his ilk do not avoid the opportunity for sexual comedy. Women fall for Britomart at a great rate and the loose ones try to get in bed with her. There are idyllic passages when Britomart acts as the protector of a damsels and they behave as if they are in love. Sorry, there's not much modern here.

E. is a real fighter, from the start and to the end; she's made for armour and that is that. She can't always meet the men in crudity, but she's where she belongs, and though she faces other puzzles, she never questions whether she ought to have her chainmail britches on.
