



# The Secret of Clouds

*Alyson Richman*

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## **The Secret of Clouds** Alyson Richman

From the #1 international bestselling author of *The Lost Wife* and *The Velvet Hours* comes an emotionally charged story about a mother's love, a teacher's promise, and a child's heart.....

Katya, a rising ballerina, and Sasha, a graduate student, are young and in love when an unexpected tragedy befalls their native Kiev. Years later, after the couple has safely emigrated to America the consequences of this incident cause their son, Yuri, to be born with a rare health condition that isolates him from other children. Maggie, a passionate and dedicated teacher agrees to tutor Yuri at his home, even though she is haunted by her own painful childhood memories. As the two forge a deep and soulful connection, Yuri's boundless curiosity and unique wisdom inspires Maggie to make difficult changes in her own life. And she'll never realize just how strong Yuri has made her — until she needs that strength the most.....

A novel that will make readers examine what it means to live life with a full heart.

## **The Secret of Clouds Details**

Date : Expected publication: February 19th 2019

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Author : Alyson Richman

Format : Paperback

Genre : Fiction, Contemporary

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# From Reader Review The Secret of Clouds for online ebook

## Holly B says

Some thoughts...

I enjoyed this story overall, the backstory of what happened in the Ukraine was riveting. Maggie's story was slower paced and fairly predictable, but held my interest. I liked the way the two stories came together to make this a memorable one for me.

*Full review closer to publication date.*

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## Pam Jenoff says

The book tells of Yuri, the young son of Ukrainian immigrants who is isolated from other children because of a rare heart condition. When Maggie agrees to come teach Yuri at home, she develops a special bond with the boy and finds herself transformed. A magical story of unlikely friendships and the ways in which teacher-student bonds can change our lives.

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## Marjorie says

When tragedy strikes the City of Kiev in Ukraine, Katya and Sasha are blissfully unaware of what is happening to their world. All they know is that the days are unusually warm and the water is like a bath and they delight in it. Years later when their son, Yuri, is born in America, they learn that unseen forces from that long ago time has caused their baby to be born with a heart condition. He needs to be protected from germs so is unable to attend school. A young, dedicated teacher Maggie is asked to tutor Yuri but at first is reluctant to do so because of childhood memories that still cause her pain. But when she meets Yuri, she gladly agrees to teach him as she knows she has met someone who will be very special in her life.

This lovely book truly touched my heart in many ways. There's the love story of Katya and Sasha and Katya's dream of becoming a ballerina. There's the story of Katya and Sasha who come to America as immigrants with so much hope for the future, only to learn of their child's illness. There's the story of Maggie as a young girl who suffered a loss she never is able to leave behind her. There's the story of the grown up Maggie whose soul rejoices every time she walks into her classroom and faces the children she cares so much for. But most of all there's the story of Yuri, whose soul refuses to bend under adversity and who teaches all around him how to live each day to its fullest.

This is the first book I've read by Alyson Richmond. She's a writer whose poetic side shines throughout her work. The ending is one of the most touching I've ever read. I can only wish that my own grandsons will always have teachers as dedicated as Maggie.

Recommended.

This book was given to me by the publisher in return for an honest review.

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## **Sue says**

The cover of this book is beautiful and the great news is that the story within this cover is even more beautiful. It's a wonderful story with characters that I quickly loved and cheered for while I was reading. It's an emotional and heartwarming story about teachers and how they strive to teach and encourage their students. As I read it, I thought about several teachers who did the same for me.

This novel is about the lives of two main characters - Maggie a 6th grade language arts teacher whose goal as a teacher is to help her students get excited about learning. She is asked by the principal at her school to tutor a student who is unable to attend school due to a heart problem. She agrees and starts visiting Yuri two days per week. At first he is very resistant to her but she begins to connect with him through his love of the NY Yankees and they have a wonderful relationship. The other story line is about Katya, Yuri's mother. The family has emigrated from Kiev where Katya was a ballet dancer but now her main focus is on her son's health. As she tells her story, we learn about how much Katya has given up in her life but she realizes that she has gained more than she gave up.

The story is not just about a teacher's love of teaching but also about teachers realizing that they can learn from their students if they just listen. It's a story about hope and love and family. It's a wonderful story with characters that will stay in my mind long after the last page.

Thanks to the publisher for a copy of this book to read and review. All opinions are my own.

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## **Read, Run, Ramble says**

*Thank you, Penguin via First to Read, for offering me a copy of this book!*

*The Secret of Clouds* is a sweet and touching novel. I enjoyed reading about Yuri so much; he was a great kid! However, and I'm the minority here, I felt the book was mostly too "fairytale" for me. It seemed each time an obstacle arose for Maggie a solution usually somewhat kitschy or cliché would just appear and work. I don't know - it just didn't feel like there was as much struggle as you'd likely feel with a novel facing the types of adversity this one does.

Speaking of adversity, the author took on a LOT of heavy topics in this novel and I felt like only one or two (Yuri's and Katya's/Sasha's) got covered very well. Everything else was very top level and superficial, and I felt like maybe there was just too much getting shoved into one novel.

Again, I'm the minority here, most loved the novel so definitely give it a try if the description speaks to you (I did enjoy it - it just wasn't the 5 stars for me that everyone else seems to be giving it).

*I was provided with an ARC of this book by the publisher or author in exchange for an honest review. All thoughts and opinions are my own. I am not compensated for any of my reviews.*

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## **Katie B says**

I had a feeling about 20 pages in this would be an emotional read, and sure enough I was right. Whether you are a parent or not, I think it would be hard not to develop an attachment to a sick child. Yuri for sure is what drove the story.

Maggie, a young teacher, has agreed to help tutor Yuri, a boy who is not able to attend school due to his heart condition. His parents, Sasha and Katya, left Ukraine to live in America after the Chernobyl disaster. While Maggie is busy teaching Yuri reading and writing, she just might learn a thing or two from him as well.

This is the second book I have read recently in which a teacher does a writing assignment in which the children write a letter to their future selves. In this case, Maggie will send the sixth grade students' letters to them when they graduate high school. How the letters factor in later on in the story and when the secret of the clouds is revealed are really some touching and beautiful moments. The difference a good and passionate teacher can make in a child's life is also part of the appeal of this book.

While I did enjoy this book there was just something holding it back from being a 5 star read for me. The Maggie parts of the story that did not involve Yuri were the weakest in my opinion. I agree with another reviewer that it felt like any problem she faced was just magically resolved or moved on from without another mention. I just can't say I warmed up to the character 100%. Honestly though this is more nitpicking than anything as I did overall think this was a good read. So much so I finished it in a day.

Thank you to First to Read for the opportunity to read an advance digital copy! I was under no obligation to post a review and all views expressed are my honest opinion.

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## **Cheryl says**

Maggie is a young, enthusiastic English language arts teacher who enjoys challenging her sixth grade students to find beauty and meaning in the written word. She has decorated her classroom to reflect the theme of "The Mind is a Powerful Tool". When her school's principal asks her to tutor a student at his home, Maggie is a bit apprehensive. Yuri is a child who loves to learn and would like to be at school, but because of his health problems, he must stay at home. As the school year progresses, Maggie and Yuri form a powerful bond as they learn from each other.

Author Alyson Richman's beautifully written novel is a tribute to dedicated and devoted teachers and the ways in which they inspire their students. It's an emotional, heartfelt story of love, perseverance, family, and courage that you won't soon forget.

Thank you to author Alyson Richman, Berkley Publishing Group, and NetGalley for giving me the opportunity to read the ARC of this unforgettable novel.

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## **Diane S ? says**

It I just so hard to write a review about a book that proved to be a good read, a three stars read. Readers always want to read books that have ratings above the simple good. There is, however, a reading place, time for these books, books that are perfectly fine, a story that reads quickly but is written in my opinion, simply. Quick, easy to read stories, are often enjoyable in times of stress, or during busy times of year, like now.

What I enjoyed: the story flowed very well.

Ballet

A teacher who is inventive and enjoys teaching.

Loved how baseball and baseball talk brought a father and son together, although I'm not a Mets or Yankee fan.

The historical nightmare of Chernobyl.

What could have been better.

The story itself, I felt, needed more depth.

The characters just didn't seem real, were one dimensional, way too nice.

This was Angela, Esils and my monthly read. Not too surprised we all agreed.

ARC from Edelweiss

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## **Angela M says**

I was hoping to enjoy this more, given so many high ratings on Goodreads, but while there were some things I liked about it, it fell short of being a story that will be memorable for me. Maggie Topper is a teacher charged with tutoring an eleven year old boy, Yuri, who has a heart condition that keeps him from attending school. They develop a relationship that affects both of them in a positive way. My emotions were certainly touched at times, but other times, it felt melodramatic. I loved some of the characters, especially Yuri and his parents Sasha and Katya who immigrated from Kiev just before Yuri is born, but mostly the characters were just too goody-goody, especially Maggie. There are two story lines. Yuri and his family's story was the one that I wanted to keep reading about. Maggie's romance story was pretty mundane and predictable. I'm a baseball fan, so Yuri's love of baseball and the bond he shares with his father and his friend Finn was lovely to see, but Maggie trying to connect with Yuri over baseball was commendable but felt forced. The writing was simplistic and the dialogue ho hum. I did love the writing assignments Maggie gives to her students and reading them was a highlight of the book for me. While I was surprised at one thing that happens, for the most part it was predictable. I have to admit that overall it ended up being a good reprieve from some other tough books I've read recently, but not one that I loved. There's pretty much a thing that didn't work for me for every one that did, so right down the middle- 3 stars.

This was the December read with Diane and Esil, and we always have a good discussion. You'll have to read their reviews to see if we felt the same.

I received an advanced copy of this book from Berkeley through NetGalley.

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## **Kelley says**

Novel received courtesy of Elisha at Berkley Publishing Group

"The Secret of Clouds" is a novel that will be beloved by the teaching community. As teachers, we are looked down upon and disrespected so much these days. As a teacher, I found the book to be uplifting, heartbreaking and validating.

Maggie Topper teaches 5th grade language arts. She left a high paying job to pursue her passion. She is devoted to her students and finds creative ways to reach them. Before school starts, her principal asks her to tutor a boy who is too ill to attend school. As the reader learns the story of his family's immigration from Ukraine, we fall in love with Yuri and his parents.

Maggie reaches Yuri through his love of baseball. They read and discuss "Shoeless Joe". While talking about the book, Maggie realizes that what Yuri really needs is a friend his own age to talk to. Because of Maggie's love for Yuri and his family, she is able to bring joy into their home.

"The Secret of Clouds" is a novel that will truly stay with me for a long time! I even got some ideas that I'm excited about sharing with other teaches. I also got a couple of ideas for writing assignments that I would like to try in a classroom.

A terrifically inspiring read!

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## **Julie says**

Guest review for Harlequin Junkie. <https://www.harlequinjunkie.com>  
Awesome story! Highly recommend!!

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## **Susan Peterson says**

Sigh....that feeling you get when you finish a book that you don't really want to end, a story that feels like a window to your soul. The Secret of Clouds is a love letter to teachers and to the students whose lives they touch. Alyson Richman has once again transported me with her lyrical writing...and her words are transformative as well. This is a story of a young teacher and her student, a very sick boy with hopes and dreams like all other 12 year olds; I enjoyed the banter between Maggie and Yuri over baseball, books, learning and life. The Secret of Clouds is a deeply emotional read, exploring so many feelings...a mother's love, the love between teachers and students, and the dreams of a young boy who just wants to be a part of the world. It is filled with the most wonderful characters...Yuri is a character who will stay in my heart for a very long time. If you are a teacher, a student, a parent, a child....or if you've ever been a teacher, a student, a parent, or child...if you've ever dreamed of what your future would look like...this book will touch your heart. I loved that this book touched on some of my favorite things: the hopes and dreams of children, the joy a teacher feels when she connects with a student, and baseball. ♥?

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## Esil says

The Secret of Clouds has two parallel story lines. Maggie is a young teacher, trying to find her way personally and professionally. She makes a connection with a young student, Yuri, who has a serious heart condition and must be taught at home most the time. The other story line involves Yuri's parents, and their move to the US from the former Soviet Union in the 1980s. The Secret of Clouds could have been much better, but it suffered from simplistic writing, a very predictable plot and unsubtle emotions. I like my characters to be a bit more nuanced — everyone is nice and well meaning, except for Maggie's boyfriend. Unexpectedly, the end was a bit stronger than most of the book. But, overall, this was a meh — a low 3 stars.

It was made much more enjoyable though as one of my monthly reads with Angela and Diane. And thanks to Edelweiss and the publisher for an opportunity to read an advance copy.

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## Miranda Reads says

*Deep down, I believed a story could change us, and that if we read it deeply enough, a good book could transform our souls.*

Maggie, **a passionate and zealous** English language arts teacher, has been given the assignment of her life - to home-tutor a sick child (Yuri).

Yuri, child of Ukrainian immigrants Sasha and Katya, has spent most of his life **trapped indoors** due to a heart condition.

*You only get to be a kid once in your life and I'm not getting that chance.*

He has to take special precautions not to over-exert himself...which results in him spending **most of his life sitting on the wayside**.

Luckily, Maggie is able to bring him out of his shell...and through the process, she learns a thing or two along the way.

So.

Sooooo.

Sooooooooooooooooooooo.

I really **loved the perspective** of Katya and her husband, Sasha, back when they were in the Ukraine.

Katya spent her early years as **a Ukrainian ballerina** and Richman does a truly excellent job of not only setting the scene, but also **breathing life into those events**.



I was **completely enthralled** by the Chernobyl events - from Katya and Sasha's frightened first days to their daring escape.

I also **loved the love for literature**. All of the books mentioned made me want to head out and pick them up all over again.

*Ever since I had first left home, I brought with me one of the books I had ever loved.*

Unfortunately, there were **a few areas that just didn't click for me** - and those mostly centered on the main character, Maggie.

*"For those of you who are already half-asleep," I joked, "wake-up. Because this year is going to be fun."*

Throughout the book, Maggie was constantly a plucky, kind and hyper go-getter.

Her character is the kind that belongs in Anne of Green Gables - but in the later books, where Anne is so happy and good that you start to wonder what she is on.

*"That's what my mother always says about me. I'm always trying to find a sliver of light, when everyone else sees shadows. It's the romantic in me." I smiled ruefully.*

What I'm trying to say, Maggie's character just got to be too much for me. Someone with **only highs and no lows** does not give much depth to the character.

She never (ever) has a struggle that lasts more than a few pages and spends so much time wallowing in mild self-pity that I ended up not having pity for her at all.

*"This has nothing to do with you."  
"I think it does," I said, sobbing.*

**And, then there's poor Bill.**

*Who's Bill?* you ask.

*A saint personified,* I reply.

Bill is Maggie's boyfriend of six years who (from the first chapter) you can tell **he's going to be dumped** for the hot (and sensitive) music teacher at Maggie's school.

But, even though I knew it was coming, I was still interested in seeing how this would happen.

And let me tell you, **the evidence is appalling.**

*Dad offered me and Bill cups of the cider, but Bill asked if there was any beer.*

*I bit my lip. It's not that my family was all that sophisticated, but we had our rituals. Spiced cider on Thanksgiving. Mulled wine on Christmas Eve. Was asking for a Coors on Thanksgiving really necessary?*

And if **that wasn't disgusting enough**, he has the nerve go out for drinks with an old school friend (once) in

six months, to call her educational job as "practice" for motherhood (in an offhanded, excited-for-the-future way) AND to watch TV when he unwinds after work.

*"You know what I'd really like?" I said, my voice rising, "It's for you to...make me a damn fire!" I pulled the remote from his hand and shut off the TV.*

*"I want to wrap my Christmas presents tonight with that fireplace going in full blaze. That's what I want for Christmas!" I was nearly hyperventilating from my rage. "Can you do that for me, Bill? Can you?"*

Sarcasm aside, I honestly wondered if **we are supposed to side with Bill** on this relationship thing.

I just cannot see how having two beers on a thanksgiving night or gently poking fun at Maggie's family's overly-thankful gift-opening routine constitutes any sort of violent reaction.

**The way Maggie treated him just broke my heart.**

For example, Bill helps his family pick out presents for her and they're all **warm-and-fuzzy clothing** (cause Maggie always complains that she's cold - not that the audience hears that, it's just something we were told to accept).

**And...Maggie gets furious.**

*Perhaps I had made a few too many comments that I found the cottage a bit drafty, but I was just hinting that I wanted Bill to make a romantic fire.*

She then proceeds to give him a watch (a passive-aggressive gift of "time" to hint that they need to spend more time together) and then **exchange all of her presents for a slinky New Year's Eve dress.**

Her excuse? She wanted to get something that SHE'D like.

She just seems so **unnecessarily cruel** to the poor guy that when she finally broke up with him that I was honestly cheering for Bill - *he deserves to be happy!*

I think that in order for Maggie to be justified in her actions, **the book needs a reversal.**

Just swap all of their actions so that Bill becomes the cruel one then it'll be clear that breaking up with Bill would be the absolute best option for Maggie.

Other than that, my other, other sticking point was that this one felt predictable.

There was **no mystery regarding what happens** - you can tell immediately that (view spoiler)

And this is coming from the perspective of someone who **NEVER is able to predict ANYTHING.**

I'm literally **the worst at finding foreshadowing** (I went through all the HP books when I was 10, fully expecting Harry to die at the end of each book...) but I predicted all this within the first couple of chapters.

Those were my main sticking points...And looking back, I honestly just think it was the character of Maggie.

Everyone else in the book was fine - her violin-making father was wonderful, Katya's struggle was beautifully done and Yuri was a bit too sweet at times, but I'll give him a pass.

This book had so much potential, but all the focus on Maggie just marred it a bit for me.

*I feel like I'm back in middle school.*

*I recieved a free copy in exchange for an honest review*

*All quotes are from an uncorrected proof and are subject to change upon publication*

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## **Dorie - Traveling Sister :) says**

I was interested in this novel because my daughter has taught 8th grade for 15 years and having raised four daughters I have always been grateful for all of the great teachers that my girls had throughout the years. That said I found that this book was a mediocre read for me.

There are two storylines here. The book is written from the point of view of Maggie, the main character in the book. Maggie is a new teacher recently having changed careers having found her work in a PR firm in New York to be a bad fit.

Maggie and her boyfriend Bill have just moved to Long Island to get away from some of the stress of living in the city and they have found a small cottage to call home. Her relationship with Bill is loosely described but we know quite soon that things are going downhill between the two of them. We never get to know Bill's character well at all but he is pretty much always described in a negative light.

There is a second storyline which is quite interesting and that is of the sick boy's parents. Katya is an aspiring and quite talented ballerina until an unfortunate accident puts her career on hold. Sasha is a budding scientist and the couple live in Kiev, very interesting times for this area of the Ukraine. Soon conditions in their country deteriorate and with the disaster at Chernobyl nuclear power plant, Sasha convinces Katya to move to the US. Throughout the novel we get some glimpses of what their life was like before they had Yuri, their ill son who has a birth defect which affects his heart and how much exertion he can endure. I wish that their lives had been more well described as I found them to be an interesting couple with a great story to tell. Katya is convinced that Yuri was born with the birth defect because of the nuclear fallout and blames herself.

Moving on, Maggie is asked by the Principal at her school if she will tutor Yuri, she teaches 6th grade English. At first Yuri is shy but she finds that they have a mutual love of baseball and this helps to cement their relationship. Maggie also eventually enlists the aid of one of her other students, Finn, who also loves baseball, and together they make great progress with Yuri. Eventually he attends school one day a week and enjoys the baseball games.

I won't go into any more of the plot as I don't want to insert any spoilers. I thought the premise of this book was quite good but really found the writing to be somewhat mediocre and predictable. The reader can pretty

much tell what is going to happen next in the book with regards to all of the characters. There really isn't anything surprising or new that kept me turning pages.

What really lowered this read to a 3\* was the ending. It was just so perfect and with quite an unbelievable "happy ending for all" feeling. Things in real life just are never this predictable. I do thank the author for calling attention to teachers and how they use their talents to inspire students.

I received an ARC of this novel from the publisher through Edelweiss. This was a Traveling Sister read :)

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