



Unmentionables

Laurie Loewenstein

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"Exceptionally readable and highly recommended."

-- *Library Journal* (starred review)

A January 2014 **MIBA Midwest Connections** pick!

"Engaging first work from a writer of evident ability."

-- *Kirkus Reviews*

"Marian Elliot Adams'...tale is contagiously enthusiastic."

-- *Publishers Weekly*

"*Unmentionables* is a sweeping and memorable story of struggle and suffrage, love and redemption...Loewenstein has skilfully woven a story and a cast of characters that will remain in the memory long after the book's last page has been turned."

--**New York Journal of Books**

"Readers will be fascinated by this timeless glimpse into a slice of American history on the brink of significant change, whose memorable characters are both vulnerable and engaging. I loved this book!"

--**Boswell Book Company** (staff pick)

"*Unmentionables* starts small and expands to touch Chicago and war-torn France as Laurie Loewenstein weaves multiple points of view together to create a narrative of social change and the stubbornness of the human heart."

-- *Black Heart Magazine*

"A historical, feminist romance in the positive senses of all three terms: a realistic evocation of small-town America circa 1917, including its racial tensions; a tale about standing up for the equitable treatment of women; and a story about two lonely people who overcome obstacles, including their own character defects, to find love together."

-- *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* , "96 Books For Your Summer Reading List"

Marian Elliot Adams, an outspoken advocate for sensible undergarments for women, sweeps onto the Chautauqua stage under a brown canvas tent on a sweltering August night in 1917, and shocks the gathered town of Emporia with her speech: How can women compete with men in the work place and in life if they are confined by their undergarments? The crowd is further appalled when Marian falls off the stage and sprains her ankle, and is forced to remain among them for a week. As the week passes, she throws into turmoil the town's unspoken rules governing social order, women, and Negroes. The recently widowed newspaper editor Deuce Garland, his lapels glittering with fraternal pins, has always been a community booster, his desire to conform rooted in a legacy of shame--his great-grandfather married a black woman, and the town will never let Deuce forget it, especially not his father-in-law, the owner of the newspaper and Deuce's boss. Deuce and his father-in-law are already at odds, since the old man refuses to allow Deuce's stepdaughter, Helen, to go to Chicago to fight for women's suffrage.

But Marian's arrival shatters Deuce's notions of what is acceptable, versus what is right, and Deuce falls madly in love with the tall activist from New York. During Marian's stay in Emporia, Marian pushes Deuce

to become a greater, braver, and more dynamic man than he ever imagined was possible. He takes a stand against his father-in-law by helping Helen escape to Chicago; and he publishes an article exposing the county's oldest farm family as the source of a recent typhoid outbreak, risking his livelihood and reputation. Marian's journey takes her to the frozen mud of France's Picardy region, just beyond the lines, to help destitute villagers as the Great War rages on. Helen, in Chicago, is hired as a streetcar conductor surrounded by bitter men who resent her taking a man's job. Meanwhile, Deuce struggles to make a living and find his place in Emporia's wider community after losing the newspaper.

Marian is a powerful catalyst that forces nineteenth-century Emporia into the twentieth century; but while she agitates for enlightenment and justice, she has little time to consider her own motives and her extreme loneliness. Marian, in the end, must decide if she has the courage to face small-town life, and be known, or continue to be a stranger always passing through.

Unmentionables Details

Date : Published January 7th 2014 by Kaylie Jones Books (first published January 1st 2013)

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Author : Laurie Loewenstein

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From Reader Review Unmentionables for online ebook

Sam Fusil says

I (a Romani man) was having a rough night so turned to this for some entertainment when what else could I possibly have encountered but virulent anti-Romani racism. Great. Just what I needed from the world. Edit: And it's transphobic!

Caitlin says

I really enjoyed the weaving of various historical storylines. Sometimes it felt like characters or situations weren't developed enough - Helen in Chicago with the suffragette society and the character of would-be WWI veteran Emmett. However, I read it in 3 days, which is fast for me (I was on vacation though)! It ends rather abruptly - but I think that's only because I wanted to know more about what happens in Emporia, IL and to the main characters afterward!

Joyce says

Although the beginning of this novel was a slow start for me, it quickly became much more interesting and ended up being a very enjoyable and informative read. What caught my interest initially about this novel was the mention of the Chatauqua meetings. These were traveling cultural/educational programs with speakers and other performers who went from town to town in rural areas. The programs were held under tents. My mother, who was born in 1921 and grew up on a farm near a tiny community in south central KS told me about Chatauqua meetings held in a town nearby when she was growing up. She spoke of them as being very special events.

This novel starts out with a Chatauqua meeting in 1917 in Emporia, Indiana. There is also an Emporia, KS but I quickly realized it was not set there since this Emporia was described as a very small rural community and Emporia, KS is much larger with a state university. Marian, one of the speakers on the Chatauqua circuit talks about how women's underwear constricts a woman's activities---at that time women's underwear was an 'unmentionable' topic so this is how the title of the novel comes about. At the end of her talk, she stumbles and sprains her ankle which results in her having to remain in Emporia a few days. In that short time, she has a major impact on the lives of 2 other people---Deuce, a middle aged widower and editor of the town's newspaper and his 19 year old stepdaughter, Helen, who wants to get out of Emporia and get on with her life. She admires Marian and makes plans to go ahead and leave for Chicago. Deuce has always tried to please everyone and avoid confrontation at all costs resulting in his father-in-law basically running his life. Marian encourages him to be willing to take a stand on issues. After leaving Emporia, Marian goes on to volunteer in France with a Red Cross unit.

There are other secondary characters but the 3 people mentioned above are the key characters in the novel and the novel goes back and forth between these characters telling their story--each of which was equally interesting. During the course of the novel, they all face challenges and grow from those experiences to become stronger people. Deuce was my favorite character because he seemed to be the most 'human' of them---revealing character qualities so common to many people but then finally growing in courage.

This novel involves racial issues, the women's suffrage movement, a touch of romance and a vivid portrayal

of the experiences of a Red Cross unit on the battlefield in France. I highly recommend it for anyone who enjoys historical fiction.

Trish Goodwin says

Meh.

Kendra says

Few people alive today remember the Chatauqua assemblies that traveled through the Midwest states during the early to mid-1900's. These assemblies brought entertainment, educational programs, and cultural enlightenment to the people of these small rural communities. This story develops mostly in one of these communities, Emporia, where Marian Elliot Adams appears to speak about how womens' clothing restricts not only her body, but her place in society. When Marian falls off the stage and breaks her ankle after her performance, she is forced to stay in Emporia for several days. Marian distains small town life, but manages to have an impact on several people's lives - mostly for the good, although she believes herself responsible for one girl's death from tuberculosis. Although her belief is unfounded, she leaves Emporia, and travels to France to work with the Red Cross in France during World War I. The story follows Marian, as well as several of the other characters with whom she has crossed paths. This debut is meticulously researched, well-written, with interesting and well-developed characters. I highly recommend it to anyone who likes historical fiction, women's fiction, or just a good read. The book will be released January 7, 2014. Thank you to the author and the publisher for allowing me to read this advance copy!

Heather says

This was a great historical novel that, in spite of it's setting 95 years ago, has many parallels in today's society when it comes to issues of gender, race, ethnicity, and class. I felt very invested in the well-being of the protagonists, especially Marian and Helen, who are modern early 20th century women in different stages of life: one established in her career (during a time when women were generally expected to aspire only to marriage and motherhood) and the other yearning to break away from her small town and make her way in the wider world. I'm looking forward to this book's publication in January 2014 and the author's talk & book-signing at the Colgate Bookstore in February.

Lora Dudding says

I thought this book was going to be funny. I was expecting a Fanny Flagg sort of small town story. But it wasn't. I found it to be mostly boring and a slow read. The ending disappointed.

Kathy Grispon says

Maria Elliot Adams is a progressive thinking lecturer on the prairie tent show circuit, traveling from Midwest

town to town. The subject of her speech was focused on the restrictive unmentionables women were forced to wear in the workplace. In 1915 the traditional five layers of undergarments like corsets restricted movement and breathing. Her trend of thinking was an off shoot of the Woman's Suffragette movement. In small town Emporia, Illinois this was controversial for the time period. On her way off the stage Marian trips and injures her ankle, and is forced to stay in Emporia while the tent show moves onto the next town. While in town she is interviewed by newspaper editor Deuce and his daughter Helen. During her stay in town she gets involved in small town life. Helen falls under her influence and goes to Chicago to become a part of the suffragette movement. While Marian goes to France to volunteer for the Red Cross during WWI. Interesting aspects into these two movements but not enough substance. Weak ending.

Patrick says

Full disclosure: I'm a student of the publisher (Kaylie Jones), and I learned about this book through her new imprint. After buying it, I found out that the author knew my in-laws as kids in Ohio -- very small world. I'm also overly critical when it comes to my literary fiction.

That said and out of the way, the first thing that impressed me about Laurie Loewenstein's *Unmentionables* was the prose. It's incredibly tight and smart in a way that creates a unique voice without being too affected. In other words, the prose hooks the reader in the first chapter, but doesn't get in the way of the building story.

And of that story, the quiet confidence of the narrator is a great contrast to the weight of all that comes with WWI-era Midwestern America. Like any good literary work, *Unmentionables* is about its characters first, which allows Loewenstein to present the realities of history without distorting them through the revisory filter of hindsight. We get the characters' emotions through the narrator's perspective without feeling the writer's influence. This is an important distinction for any work of fiction, and Loewenstein handles it wonderfully.

Personal connections aside, this is a great debut from a masterful writer.

Kaylie Jones says

This is the flagship novel of my new imprint, Kaylie Jones Books, which I have started because I find there is little room for literary novels of this quality in mainstream publishing these days.

Akashic Books, which has for 15 years been championing the literary underdog, allowed me to start this imprint under their aegis. I will never be able to thank Johnny Temple, publisher, enough.

This novel reminds me of the best of Edith Wharton and Katherine Ann Porter. It feels like a great American novel, it holds between its covers all the vast space (and close-mindedness) of the Midwest; however, in keeping with the times in which we live, it is quite short. It has that breadth, but reads fast and smooth. The main characters are wonderfully complex and three-dimensional, flawed, but human, and full of compassion.

I am delighted that the book has received such vast praise already, and is not even published yet. It has been highlighted by the American Library Association; the Heartland Forum; and now has been chosen by the Midwest Booksellers Association as one of their three Midwest Connections Picks for January 2014.

Melissa says

This book make you proud to be a woman. American, French or otherwise a proud and strong woman. Unmentionables deals with real historical issues which are still relevant today. Realistic to the time period and very engaging. You feel the book long after you are done. Ms. Loewenstein has the ability to transport you back to this time period. Very very good read.

I won this book through goodreads.

Cherie Waggie says

Amazing how "historical" fiction can get you to thinking about what all is going on right this very minute in time. History is history. Unfortunately, despite all the bad that happened, it can't be undone. This story is set during the time of WWI, when women were still fighting to get the vote and to be paid fairly for the work they were doing while the men were at war, and how unfairly they were treated by the "men" who were their bosses and co-workers. I think the women today have forgotten the sacrifices and injustices these women faced just so we could have what we have and do what we do today. Sometimes, we need to be reminded and be more appreciative.

Story Circle Book Reviews says

Laurie Lowenstein's debut historical fiction novel, *Unmentionables*, is set in 1917-1918 weaving three diverse locations into the complicated plot: The small town of Emporia, Illinois; the Red Cross's involvement in World War I; and finally the high school valedictorian's misadventures in Chicago—all described in compassionate and vivid detail. Readers are kept on their toes absorbing all the events, with action weaving in and out between the characters. It is a strong story that stays with the reader long after reading the book.

The two protagonists are Deuce Garland and Marian Elliot Adams. Marian's direct manner disarmed her conservative Chautauqua audience as she began her speech: "I am here tonight to discuss the restrictive nature of women's undergarments." She knew she had their attention. Marian fell and severely sprained her ankle after her speech; she had to stay in town to recuperate. She made no secret of her dislike of small towns, believing her city background was superior to that of the country folk.

Deuce, an Emporia native, finds the courage to leave his wealthy father-in-law's paper and start his own newspaper, one that will challenge readers to think. Typhoid was killing at random, and he uses his investigative reporting skills discover the cause. Cultural prejudice is rampant, and Deuce attempts to change his reader's attitudes.

A few months later Marian finds herself on the front lines of the war in France with the American Red Cross. She experiences an epiphany as she observes villagers who lose nearly everything, yet maintain an air of discretion and dignity. She finds similarities in the community pride of the French villagers and the Midwestern town of Emporia.

An important second-tier character is Helen, the bright eighteen-year-old daughter of Deuce, who defies her controlling grandfather and takes the train to Chicago to make a life for herself. Marian gives her suffragist references and contacts. After a year of struggling as a trolley conductor, Helen pursues her dreams of

writing for the suffragist paper, *Woman's Weekly Gazette*, where she quickly becomes the editor.

I learned many things about everyday American history and WWI from this superbly researched novel. I loved Lowenstein's depiction of the Chautauqua Speakers Circuit, their schedule lines, and their determination to reach the masses with timely educational lectures. The WWI time frame and women's issues combined to create a suspenseful and memorable novel. I was seduced by *Unmentionables*.

by Ann McCauley
for Story Circle Book Reviews
reviewing books by, for, and about women

Yvette (bookworlder) says

Laurie Loewenstein's *Unmentionables* is the best work of historical fiction I have read in the past few years.

From the heat and excitement of the Chautauqua assemblies, to the prejudices and politics of segregated small town America, to the dangerous French countryside of World War I, the settings are firmly planted in 1917. Where some authors of the genre stop a story to relate facts they found through research, this author seamlessly integrates her research into the story, and a well researched story it is. Complete with wonderful small details such as a shirtwaist that smells of starch, a japanned tray, and the use of "crimintently."

With a story revolving mainly around a suffragette and a small town publisher, I expected the cause of the suffragette movement to be the primary impetus for conflict in the story. But rather than a story about conflicts, though there are several and they are quite interesting and serve the story well, to me this is a novel focused more on how the characters relate to each other, and how they grow through their interactions.

I expect that many readers of *Unmentionables* will identify with Marian or possibly Deuce or his step-daughter Helen. It surprised me, partly because I didn't have much sympathy for her initially, when I found myself contemplating Tula after finishing the novel. She had grown on me until I began identifying with her and ended up greatly enjoying her storyline.

As much as I enjoyed this novel, and feel that this review does not do it justice, there were a few minor points that were negatives for me (and are only mentioned to give some little balance to this review):

The name Deuce somehow just sits wrong with me. I went into this novel with a prejudice against this name and did not lose my dislike of it, though it was a bit better once I knew it was a nickname and the story behind it.

The introduction of the ambulance drivers' names was so abrupt, that it took me out of the story as I tried to figure out who these new characters were and look back to see if I had missed an explanation for the use of nicknames such as "Links" and "The Gish."

As this was an ARC that I won through the GoodReads First Reads program (and I was thrilled to get it, the title alone had me hooked), I was very surprised to find only one typo – the omission of the word "to" on page 145 of my copy -which is an incredibly minor problem and probably fixed.

This is definitely a novel I would recommend (but maybe not so much to my mother, as she really wouldn't approve of the brief and non-gratuitous sexual content) and will be putting it in the "re-read this" section of my bookshelves.

Lisa Musil says

The story itself was good--but it needed a good proof/beta reader--the word "reins" was spelled "reigns" twice--and there was a discrepancy with time--a character says a man had kissed her 34 years ago--when they were both young adults--but that spring he had met another woman with a 2 year old daughter--who was now 19. So--17 years?
