

# **Honor - Pitch**

## **By Bryce Cyrier**

### **Summary**

*Honor* is a trilogy of immersive audiobooks inspired by the lives and unsung legacies of female heroes during the Civil War, centered around Dr. Mary Walker — the first female U.S. Army surgeon and the first and only woman to receive the Medal of Honor.

Despite constant misogyny and maltreatment, Dr. Walker ventures into battlefields, prisons, hospitals, and great halls of politics. She rubs shoulders with generals, spies, and female soldiers in disguise, even famous figures like Clara Barton, Susan B. Anthony, Walt Whitman, and Abraham Lincoln.

She also navigates scrutiny and infighting within the nascent women's movement and grapples with the specters of betrayal and a shattered marriage. Her riveting journey is equal parts war story, medical drama, and underdog saga.

Across three books (read: seasons), each with eight serialized parts, *Honor* weaves together a dramatized narrative with cinematic sound design and excerpts of original letters and essays. It brings to life a grievously overlooked figure whose principles and accomplishments paved the way for women's suffrage and the on-going fight for equality.

### **Characters**

#### **DR. MARY WALKER**

Intelligent, tenacious, and persistent to a fault, Mary hurls herself into the war effort with a singular goal: to obtain a commission as a Union Army surgeon. After repeated rejections she decides to volunteer, determined to prove her merit in action. For two years she serves without pay in hospitals around the capital, on the Front, even behind enemy lines, working every angle she can think of to reach her objective.

She is focused, principled, and ambitious; fiercely loyal and intolerant of injustice. She's a reformer and a misfit, often ridiculed for her alternative wardrobe and unconventional attitudes. Amidst the obstacles, she labors tirelessly to elevate herself and others, exemplifying in word and deed the virtues of her cause. Through the horrors of great battles, despite abuse and blatant discrimination, she never gives up on her commitment to contribute.

After the war, Mary receives the Medal of Honor, becomes a renowned writer and lecturer, and makes waves as an instrumental albeit controversial figure of the women's rights movement. In 1917, the government redefines the criteria for the

Medal of Honor and rescinds Mary's medal for not being a commissioned officer during her service. She never returns her medal, wearing it proudly on her lapel until she dies in 1919 — one year before the 19th Amendment is ratified, finally acknowledging women's right to vote.

### CLARA BARTON

A sharp, earnest woman of great ability, Clara was a teacher and a clerk before the war. After the First Battle of Bull Run, when wagon loads of wounded soldiers begin streaming into Washington where she works, she becomes a nurse and dedicates herself to providing aid to those in need. She soon crosses paths with Dr. Mary Walker and their fates become intertwined as they brave the battlefields together. Clara is later renowned for her courage and compassion, hailed as the American Florence Nightingale. After the war, Clara Barton goes on to found the American Red Cross.

Note: While portrayed as a genuine friend of Mary's and a true feminist in her own right, Clara also serves as a foil to Mary's staunch nonconformity. She chooses to operate within conventional feminine norms and society rewards her for it. Meanwhile, Mary refuses to compromise her values or change her honest self-expression, and she is ostracized for it.

### DOROTHEA DIX

As Superintendent of Army Nurses for the Union, Dorothea wields her influence with severity and exactness. She imposes a strict set of criteria for nurses, hiring only "plain-looking" women between 35-50 years old, restricting them to only black or brown dresses, and insisting they abstain from wearing jewelry or makeup. Compliance and propriety are her watchwords.

While she and her nurses perform notable service during the war, she's notorious for firing nurses at a whim and often feuds with other nurses and doctors for control over medical facilities. She's threatened by the likes of Mary Walker and Clara Barton and jockeys for recognition throughout the war.

At the end of the conflict, she is formally lauded with the bestowal of two national flags, for "the Care, Succor, and Relief of the Sick and wounded Soldiers of the United States on the Battle-Field, in Camps and Hospitals during the recent war."

### LUCY HIGGS

An enslaved woman from North Carolina, Lucy is honest, intelligent, and kind in spite of the horrors inflicted on her and her family while in bondage. After her brother dies, she and her husband make a daring escape from Grays Creek, Tennessee, along with their 5-year old daughter. They're pursued by their enslavers but find refuge at the front lines of the Union Army. Lucy becomes a

nurse for the 23rd Indiana Infantry Regiment and deploys her skills as a seamstress, laundress, cook, singer, and forager.

Over the course of the war she becomes well-loved and respected by the men, and is a vital support at key battles. She loses her daughter at the Siege of Vicksburg and the soldiers hold a funeral in her honor. She still faces frequent racism and sexism but remains determined to play her part in the fight for equality.

After the war, she is included in the Union Army's victory march and becomes the first and only Black woman to join The Grand Army of the Republic, a Union Army veterans' association.

### **FRANCES HOOK**

Orphaned at a young age and raised by her brother, Frances Hook is a cunning, pugnacious teen with a fire to prove herself. She's fourteen at the outbreak of the Civil War, and when her brother enlists in the Union Army she cuts off her hair, pretends to be a man, and enlists alongside him. Frances fights bravely in several significant battles, dodging suspicious comrades and hiding her wounds to avoid her sex being discovered by doctors.

When her brother is killed and a serious injury reveals her true identity, she runs away and joins another regiment. After capture and imprisonment by the Confederates, and a botched escape resulting in another injury, Frances is ultimately freed in a prisoner exchange. She then joins up with the Army of the Cumberland in northern Georgia, where she encounters Dr. Mary Walker. So impressed by her daring deeds, Mary wants to publicize Frances' story as part of her strategy to earn women the commissions they are owed. Frances resists, wishing to maintain her anonymity and continue to fight.

Like so many other women who fought in disguise, she is never formally recognized for her service after the war.

### **WALT WHITMAN**

Renowned poet and journalist, the "father of free verse," Whitman is a passionate creative and fervent transcendentalist. His work is controversial in his time for its unfettered explorations of death and embrace of sensuality. He is suspected of being homosexual due to certain lines in his poems and several long-term male friendships he maintains throughout his life.

At the outset of the Civil War, his poem "Beat! Beat! Drums!" serves as a patriotic rallying cry. However, the tenor and content of his work evolves throughout the conflict, taking a darker turn after he witnesses the harsh realities of the Front.

When his brother George is suspected dead at the Battle of Fredericksburg, Walt leaves New York to locate him. He's relieved to find him merely wounded, but the carnage and loss he observes at the field hospitals (where, incidentally, Dr. Mary Walker and Clara Barton are working at the time), are so egregious that Walt becomes a nurse in Washington. He spends the remainder of the war there, aiding the Union in various roles. Shortly after the war he is fired from a clerkship "on moral grounds," after his superior found a copy of Walt's seminal work *Leaves of Grass*.

## **NARRATOR**

The audiobook is narrated by an unknown female character in her early 70s. She alludes to having witnessed the events in question and claims an association with Mary Walker. Her professed purpose is to "rectify the history." As the story progresses, we piece together clues about her possible identity.

## **Trilogy Arcs**

### **Book One: Commissions**

Follows the early quest of Dr. Mary Walker to obtain a commission in the Union Army, from her work in DC hospitals into the thick of the bloodiest battles. Through obstacles and rejections, and after many months of proving herself in the field, she finally gets the chance to face the Army's Examination Board. With a bunch of bigoted, patriarchal officers at the helm, will the board even give her a fair shot? After a protracted examination, they deny her yet again. However, Book One ends on a surprise meeting with General George Thomas, who was impressed by her service in the battle of Chattanooga. Walker learns that he's ignoring the board's recommendation and making her a surgeon anyway. Although still a civilian contractor, Walker is relieved to finally receive an income.

Throughout Book One, we also get occasional flashbacks to Mary's past, learning about her upbringing, early discrimination for her dress reform choices, and the pain she still carries over the disintegration of her marriage.

Our B-Stories include:

- Frances Hook, who fights valiantly in the Union Army while avoiding detection as a woman in disguise. At the end of Book One, she is captured by Confederate soldiers and imprisoned.
- Lucy Higgs, who escapes slavery, narrowly evades recapture, and becomes a Union nurse. By the end of Book One, she overcomes the soldiers' disrespect and begins to gain their trust.

- Walt Whitman, who struggles to translate the magnitude of the war into his work; after witnessing the true horrors on the frontlines, he goes to Washington to see how he can help. At the end of Book One, he decides to become a nurse.
- Clara Barton, Mary's colleague and friend whose valiant work on battlefields pushes Mary to work on the frontlines. At the end of Book One, Clara and Walt Whitman treat a Confederate deserter imprisoned in DC — a man named Peter Doyle.

### **Book Two: Prisons**

Now that Dr. Mary Walker is officially an Army surgeon, she faces the indignity of asinine gossip about “how she got there.” Amidst this abuse and discrimination she also becomes a Union spy, treating civilians behind enemy lines and gathering intelligence to aid in the Union's impending Atlanta Campaign. After several close calls, she gets captured and becomes a prisoner of war in a notorious Confederate prison. Book Two follows her suffering and hardships while captive and the ways she continues her fight until regaining freedom.

Throughout this installment, we also flash *forward* to Mary's post-war efforts, still fighting for acknowledgment of her and other women's service. Book Two ends on a high note with her receiving the Medal of Honor.

Our B-Stories continue, with some new characters introduced:

- After meeting Dr. Mary Walker, Frances Hook grapples with the doctor wanting to publicize her story. She debates whether to raise awareness to women's contributions in the war or maintain her anonymity to continue fighting. Book Two ends with her sitting down with a journalist for an interview.
- Mary and Molly Bell are cousins who disguised themselves to fight in the Confederate cavalry. After being discovered and accused of prostitution, they are imprisoned in the same place as Dr. Mary Walker. Over time, Mary befriends them and learns of the myriad mistreatments they've faced. By the end of Book Two, the Bells are released but prohibited from any further contact with the army.
- Walt Whitman serves as a nurse in Washington, DC, thrust into Dorothea Dix's rigorous training and the bloody demands of a war they seem to be losing. He continues writing poetry and sparks an unlikely relationship with the Confederate deserter [Peter Doyle](#). At the end of Book Two, Whitman's brother dies from tuberculosis.

- As Lucy Higgs provides aid for the 23rd Indiana Infantry Regiment, she struggles to keep her young daughter safe near the frontlines. Her daughter is tragically killed in the Siege of Vicksburg. At the end of Book Two, the soldiers in Lucy's regiment hold a special funeral service in her honor.
- Clara Barton takes a post caring for Black soldiers of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment in the Sea Islands, SC. She befriends and works alongside a formerly enslaved woman named Betsey. Despite their valiant service they face regular discrimination from the male doctors. Book Two ends with Clara being suddenly ordered by a general to evacuate her post.

### **Book Three: Omissions**

Book Three follows Dr. Mary Walker's successes and failures in the final years of the war. She returns from prison to much notoriety in Washington — even getting to meet President Lincoln on multiple occasions — and yet she is hard pressed to line up her next military position. She takes a post as the surgeon in charge of the Louisville Female Military Prison, where she faces competitive, vitriolic colleagues who launch a campaign to besmirch her character and get her ousted for good. Meanwhile, she discovers her husband is challenging their divorce (which at the time took six years to legally take effect), exacerbating her public humiliation and dredging up all her old wounds. Never a victim, Mary makes it her quest to clear her name and continue serving while staying true to her principles.

Accompanying our main timeline, we also flash forward to Mary in her elder years. She doggedly fights for women's suffrage but faces increased rejection by the leaders of the women's movement. Meanwhile, we witness Clara Barton's rise to fame as she establishes the American Red Cross. Then, in the twilight of her life, Mary Walker's Medal of Honor is rescinded. [She continues to wear it](#) until the day she dies. Book Three ends with the Nineteenth Amendment being ratified.

Our B-Stories wrap up:

- As battles rage on, Clara Barton becomes concerned with the thousands of unanswered letters by relatives of fallen soldiers. When the war ends, she creates the Office of Missing Soldiers, helming a movement to locate and properly bury the dead and give closure to their grieving families. Book Three ends with an older Clara Barton establishing the American Red Cross.
- Lucy Higgs has not heard from her husband in over a year, since he joined up with a colored regiment in Virginia. After numerous attempts to contact him she assumes he is dead and mourns the loss of another loved one. After the war, she

remarries and goes on to see her husband exercise his right to vote under the newly ratified Fifteenth Amendment.

- As the war nears end, Walt Whitman works as a clerk in the Bureau of Indian Affairs but gets fired by his boss “on moral grounds” (because of his scandalous poems and suspected relationship with Peter Doyle). Walt’s next job is to interview former Confederate soldiers for pardons. Near the end of Book Three Lincoln is assassinated, after which Whitman writes his famous poem, *O Captain! My Captain*. While it’s lauded as his most accessible and conventional work, he maintains his quiet, steady relationship with Peter Doyle for several years.
- Frances Hook tries to rejoin the army to finish the war, but is turned away various times. Yearning to still contribute to a cause, she gets involved in the women’s movement. She witnesses Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s stark disapproval of Mary Walker and must decide whose side to take. In our final flash forward, we meet an elderly Frances Hook — ***who is revealed to be our narrator this whole time***. She walks to the polling booth to cast her vote in the 1920 election.