



The Captain's Wife

Douglas Kelley

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Based on the true story of Mary Patten, *The Captain's Wife* begins in July 1856 during the heyday of the great clipper ships. Mary's husband, Captain Joshua Patten, is hired to navigate Neptune's Car on a treacherous voyage from New York to San Francisco through one of the most dangerous straits in the Western Hemisphere Cape Horn. Early on, trouble erupts on the ship. When the first mate is put in chains for plotting a mutiny and the captain falls ill, Mary must take command of the ship. Having learned how to navigate during her last voyage with her husband, Mary is forced to put her skills, authority, and wits to the test as she demands respect from the crew, nurses her husband day and night, and keeps the mutinous first mate at bay. Using little known facts about Mary Patten's life, Douglas Kelley has crafted a brilliant and gripping tale of deception, danger, and treachery on the high seas.

The Captain's Wife Details

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Author : Douglas Kelley

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From Reader Review The Captain's Wife for online ebook

GrannyMary says

TheAuthor provided too much detailed information about clipper ships. Sometimes I skipped over those parts if it wasn't central to the story.

Anne says

I think it would be helpful to have included a diagram of clipper ships with the book. Some of the parts describing the ship and sails go a little confusing. I looked one up but it would have been much easier if it had been included.

Nicole Kruck says

A low 3, bordering on 2.5. admittedly based on my ignorance on the subject of sailing. so much of the book was detail on how the ship was being sailed that it all ran together in a haze of words. perhaps if I knew anything about sailing, catching the wind, or even had a clear visual in my head of what the ship looked like and where all the sails were I would have enjoyed it more.

Katy Sheehy says

OK, this one I just couldn't get into. It just wasn't that compelling. I appreciate that she was a real person, and her accomplishments were amazing for the time period of her life, but this is one of the few books that I put down before finishing. Oh well - you can't love them all!!

Faith Justice says

From Booklist: We know very little of Mary Patten, a nineteenth-century Bostonian woman who became captain of her husband's ship, Neptune's Car, after he fell dangerously ill at sea. Kelley has fictionalized Patten's unique story, using nautical records, newspaper articles, and interviews from the time. The result is an entertaining and suspenseful romantic adventure story for those who prefer the made-for-TV-type version of Patten's life at sea to the scant but factual information available. Kelley's Mary Patten is quite the wonder woman. Courageous and attractive, Mary is tough and noble, which enables her to learn navigation, take command of Neptune's Car, nurse her unconscious husband, and deflate the mutinous rumblings of the troublesome and demoted first mate, all the while keeping her pregnancy a secret for fear of the crew doubting her physical capabilities.

My review: A decent fictionalization of a real incident. Kelley wows us with his historical nautical research and grasp of sensory detail - I felt the cold waves sweep over the bows as the ship rounded Cape Horn. Character development is a bit lacking. Mary, her husband Joshua and the second mate Hare are wise and noble and self-sacrificing. The "antagonist" first mate is a brooding bully. They start out that way and end

that way with no personal growth or insight.

The story itself is fascinating. I always thought women were considered bad luck on ships, so to find that captains regularly brought their wives and sometimes children on long voyages was very interesting. Kelley uses a writerly device in the beginning with a prologue set during the most dangerous part of the voyage, then reverts to linear narrative to show us how Mary and the ship arrive in such straights. This is a good thing, because the story starts slowly and Kelley spends waaaay too much time (over 150 pages) getting us to the dangerous sailing. Without the tease at the beginning, I'm sure many people would give it up as a dull read.

Another oddity about this book: the Author's Note and Acknowledgments in the back of the book feels abrupt and incomplete. I turned the page to read more and found a blank page. It seemed to end in the middle of his story on how he did his research - which as a historical fiction writer, I always enjoy. Maybe this is a defective copy or maybe Kelly just wrote a lousy Author's Note!

Jessica says

This book was way too slow. The author took forever to get into some action and conflict and even then it felt like a sneeze that wouldn't come. The first 160 pages followed the same formula, Captain shows his wife Mary Patten how to take nautical measurements and chart course. First Mate Keeler fails to drive the ship as fast as it can go. Captain reprimands First Mate Keeler. Keeler seethes. Hit the reset button and start again. The entire time the reader is itching for some conflict, explosion, outburst from someone, anyone just to break up the repetition.

Finally around page 180 or so the conflict between Captain and First Mate erupts. This is what those 160 pages have been leading up to, but it's a huge let down. The entire confrontation is over in a blink of an eye and for all the build-up, and was totally unsatisfying.

Then the remainder of the novel returns to formulaic pace. Mary Patten takes nautical measurements and charts course. Second Mate Hare doubts his abilities to run the ship. Mary nurses the unconscious Captain.

It was so frustrating! This story had everything going for it and there were so many elements the author could have used to better advantage, mutiny, grave illness, an angry sea, a ship full of sailors under the command of a woman. I have been trying to figure out which one of those was the story's antagonist. But none of them were strong enough to be considered the antagonist. Then I thought perhaps this novel wasn't about the conflict but the journey. This idea left me just as cold. Mary didn't grow into the strong woman she could have during this journey. Outside of the few pep talks to the crew and the nautical readings she did little an actual Captain would do. I was hoping for her to turn into a strong, take no prisoner, swashbuckling captain, barking orders and ruling with an iron fist by the end of the voyage. Sadly, not only did she not grow into that strong role, but at the end of the book she states her opinion that women are not equal to men and scoffs at the idea of the Suffragettes using her as an example of equality.

In the end this book left me wanting more and feeling completely unfulfilled.

Paula Hess says

Good historical fiction read based on the life of Mary Patten

Christine says

The Captain's Wife is based on a true story. During the days of the merchant fleets, post California Gold Rush, a young captain takes his wife on a trip from New York to San Francisco. They're newly married, and this is the second trip she will take with her husband. She is certain it will be her last, as purchasing a permanent home and having children is in the near future.

We join the Captain as he is making final arrangements for his trip. He has a strong, fast ship and a great crew. His one problem is that his first mate is ill and can't make the trip. He wants to wait to find a good first mate, but is pressured by the ship owners to find a suitable first mate and get the ship moving. There is competition to beat two new ships, and the owners are feeling the pressure.

The Captain grudgingly hires a first mate he has doubts about and they set sail with fanfare. The first part of their journey is a love affair with the ocean. The wife continues her training on navigation from her husband and enjoys the calm waters.

With all good stories, things don't remain calm. The weather challenges the crew. First with no wind, and then with severe weather as they approach Cape Horn. The entire time the Captain wonders about the first mate. It seems like he's sleeping on his shift, keeping the sails loose instead of maximizing wind capacity, and bullying the crew.

Without sharing too much, I'll say that the first mate ends up in chains in the "hole." The Captain becomes ill, so ill that he loses consciousness and can't lead the ship. The second mate can run the ship, but he doesn't know how to navigate. This is when the Captain's wife steps in. Working with the second mate, they round Cape Horn with the ship in one piece and get the ship to their destination.

It was a great read. I learned a great deal, and Kelley did a good job of bringing the characters to life. I'd recommend this to lovers of historical fiction.

Sabrina says

Douglas Kelley took known facts about the *Neptune's Car* voyage and created a beautifully impressive story around it. For a 1st novel it is very clear the man can write. The research was thorough and authentic, giving me the chance to experience the story, not just read about it. I could picture the sails firm up with wind; describe Mary and the helmsman struggles against the wheel and feel the spray from the ocean. Kudos to Kelley for giving me a chance to live this story.

I love this story and yet, how scary. What was Mary really thinking, how was she feeling and how the heck did she accomplish what she accomplished. It's not to say woman aren't capable, just that they didn't do these things back then. For Mary Patten to be able to take command of a clipper ship and set its course is pretty amazing – historic actually and I wish there was more known about her. Thank goodness she learned navigation! And to think none of this could have been done had she not had the seamen's support. But, it's very clear she did because there was a capable 1st mate available. He may have been mean, hard and in custody, but he was experienced and a man. That the crew rallied around Mr. Hare and Mrs. Patten instead speaks volumes.

The love between Mrs. Patten and Joshua was very tastefully written and I only hope was that sweet. It seems so, through the limited comments Mary Patten made and the dedication shown to her husband during and after his sickness. What a sad story all around.

I enjoyed reading the Epilogue which discussed what happened after the voyage and answered some of the questions that came up during the story. I too wish that we could know what happened to Mr. Hare, what was Mr. Keeler's fate and why did he do what he did. Was he partly or wholly responsible for Mr. Patten's illness? The last couple of lines in this book are perfect: "For the duration of this voyage, his actions were significant and his life important, but in the broad sweep of history, he fades into anonymity. His story, like that of Joshua and Mary Patten, is a short one, lasting 138 days. All else is as fleeting and transient as a wake upon the ocean."

Bonnie says

I hate not finishing books that I own, but this was just too poorly written.

The Poisonwood Bible to The Captain's Wife by way of a female protagonist who is placed into 'fish out of water' circumstances

Corinne says

Interesting historical figure but story was slow without any literary feel. I found the detail on sailing new and somewhat interesting though. Made me want to know more about sailing itself but the story could have been better told.

Mary says

I was in the mood for historical fiction and found this sea tale just right for summer reading. Clipper ship sets sail from New York, bound for San Francisco around Cape Horn, and the captain wants to make the trip fast. Mary Patten, the captain's wife, has been married to Joshua Patten for about a year and is only 17 years old. They are still very much in love, practically newlyweds. Accompanying him on just one other voyage, Mary stayed by his side and insisted he teach her to navigate. She gets pretty good at it until a lightning strike sent her below to nurse injured sailors. Good training for this trip and its trials. My previous historical ship reads have been mostly pirate stories. I learned some new sailing terms and customs and enjoyed the book.

Laura says

This is a book I wasn't sure I would like but I really loved it. It is a story of love and hope. A story of a couple, the man a ships' captain and she his loving wife, who set out to sail the seas from NY to San Francisco; albeit racing with another ship!. The captain has trouble locating a good first mate in NY but settles on someone he hopes will work out. Fairly soon that person causes divisions in the crew, makes his own rules, doesn't abide by the captain and ends up attacking the captain. Placed in the hold a young second

mate takes over but he is unable to read. While the captain is abed from the attack; she schools the mate and navigates the ship. She nurses her husband daily and helps guide the ship through terrible weather and keeps the crew engaged in their goal; to reach San Francisco! This is based on a true story of a 19 year old woman who rose to take a lead in sea travel in the mid 1800's!

Sarah says

I really enjoyed the story in this one. The author chose a story rich in detail and potential and just expanded on that beautifully. What results is an engaging novel that keeps the reader engaged from port to port. I really have to commend the author on the pacing he employs while writing this. I found that there was never a time where the reader was bogged down too much in downtime. The times when the ship was becalmed or peaceful days of sea travel were offset by the tragedies of sickening captain and mutinous first mate, safely navigating the ship through perilous seas and horrific storms, and all while trying to figure out how to survive till San Francisco.

My one critique would be how the author would get far too technical at times. There are extremely detailed passages in this book on navigation, the intricacies of the sails and rigging, and how a clipper ship is run and sailed. While yes I can see the place some of this would have in the novel, far too many times the reader is bogged down in excessive detail to the point of eye-rolling and skimming to more juicy parts.

Altogether, this is an enjoyable novel from the Age of Sail. It tells an engrossing story of survival and triumph in a way that doesn't make the reader tired to the effort. Yet, it must be noted that this novel could have benefited from some extensive cutting of technical aspects badly. But, overall, I enjoyed this novel immensely and would recommend it to anyone who enjoys Age of Sail novels, especially ones with strong female leads (they're not that common).

Janellyn51 says

This was a really nice little book. I love stuff about the sea...which may have something to do with being descended from a crusty old sailor names Phineas Pratt. For a first book I thought it was really well written. Mary Patten, God Bless her...and her curiosity, or boredom, whatever it was that made her want to learn how to use a sextant, and read charts! It's a sad sad story, and I wish that there was more information on what eventually happened to her. But, imagine my surprise to get to the last 5 or so pages and find out that her husband died in the Somerville Lunatic Asylum....I've lived in Somerville for 30 years now. They are both buried in Everett...I thought maybe I'd go try to find her, and tell her one more time what a swell job she did making it around the Horn.
