



The Scarlet Kimono

Christina Courtenay

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Abducted by a Samurai warlord in 17th-century Japan – what happens when fear turns to love?

England, 1611, and young Hannah Marston envies her brother's adventurous life. But when she stows away on a merchant ship, her powers of endurance are stretched to their limit. Then they reach Japan and all her suffering seems worthwhile – until she is abducted by Taro Kumashiro's warriors.

In the far north of the country, samurai warlord Kumashiro is intrigued to learn more about the girl who he has been warned about by a seer. There's a clash of cultures and wills, but they're also fighting an instant attraction to each other.

With her brother desperate to find her and the jealous Lady Reiko equally desperate to kill her, Hannah faces the greatest adventure of her life. And Kumashiro has to choose between love and compromising his honour ...

The Scarlet Kimono Details

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Author : Christina Courtenay

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From Reader Review The Scarlet Kimono for online ebook

Sue Moorcroft says

I'm almost at the end of this epic love story. Christina writes with such conviction and authority about Japan and the Japanese that I wished to be back there - even though I only once spent a few weeks there years ago.

Now finished and nothing about this book disappointed. Loved it.

Jane Stewart says

3 ½ stars. Most of the story was pretty good. The ending was happy but felt a little ho hum.

This felt like “Shogun” but done romance style. English female Hannah stows away on a ship to escape a horrible marriage her father arranged. When she gets to Japan, the local ruler Taro (similar to a governor) is interested in her and she in him. By the end of the book they fall in love. This is a romance story so this should not be a spoiler. Interesting things happen along the way. I enjoyed Hannah’s relationship with the Japanese cook who takes care of her and teaches her the Japanese language.

I was intrigued with Taro’s mysterious wife and sister-in-law, but the author did not complete that part of the story. There was something cold and strange about the wife but we never knew what or why. Same thing about the sister-in-law. I wanted more back story and explanation about them.

I did not like the reason for the separation of the couple near the end. It felt like the author threw it in as part of “the formula.” It wasn’t necessary and I felt it didn’t fit the motivations of the characters. Hannah loves Taro and wants to stay with him but she didn’t tell him that.

I did not like the author’s method of story telling for the first 120 pages. She was telling two different stories. One set in Japan and one set in England. She spent about 5 pages on one and then 5 pages on the other. It was too many interruptions. It was jarring. I would have preferred maybe 30 to 40 pages in each story before switching to the other story. Instead there were about 22 short excerpts interrupting each other. Finally at page 120 the author stops the switching around and we have just one chronological story continuing to the end.

DATA:

Narrative mode: 3rd person. Story length: 332 pages. Swearing language: mild. Sexual language: none to mild. Number of sex scenes: about two plus one referred to. Setting: 1611 to 1613 Japan, England, and onboard ship. Copyright: 2011. Genre: historical romance.

Gaile says

Hannah Marston stows away on a ship rather than marry the man her father has chosen for her. This leads to a very very long voyage all the way to Japan. Yanagihara warns his lord, Taro Kumashiro that a red headed woman and she is his fate.

When Hannah does arrive and Taro sees her, he orders her kidnapped and brought to him intending to return her when he has satisfied his curiosity. Fortunately his good intentions go by the wayside but the fates

conspire to pry them apart again and yet again.

I had not thought I would enjoy this book so much as I have little interest in Japan but I just have to highly recommend this one!

Laura Summers says

Reviewed for www.bookchickcity.com

Christina Courtenay has this fabulous ability of creating a vivid and rich setting to her books. The historical Japanese backdrop of this novel was one of the things that really made it for me.

The book opens in 17th century England with our heroine Hannah Marston being forced into an arranged marriage by her parents. Unable to bear the man she is due to marry, she stows away on one of her brother's boats which is just about to begin an epic journey to Japan, disguised as a boy.

A journey to Japan in the 17th century is no small undertaking, and unlike some other more fluffy romances I have picked up before, I liked that the novel didn't shy away from the difficulties faced by a crew on such a vast and dangerous sea trip. From illness, starvation, sickness and death. Although as with any girl disguised as boy stories, you do have to suspend your disbelief that in two years only one member of the crew manages to guess that she is actually a girl.

Our male lead is the proud Japanese warlord Taro and the story alternates between Hannah and Taro's viewpoints, portraying two very distinctly different stories at first. As the novel spans a good couple of years before they even meet, there is a lot of interesting scene setting from Hannah's difficult journey and Taro's painful first marriage, which is as enjoyable as the love story itself.

Taro learns of Hannah's arrival many years in advance via a vision from his sensei, and has been awaiting for the arrival of the flame haired woman long before she arrives. When she does arrive the romance is slow in growing and is built with absolute care by Ms Courtenay. It is a fascinating clash of cultures, and is detailed with many twists and turns involving a collection of characters that continue to have a big impact on Hannah and Taro's lives. Taro is terribly proud and more than a touch arrogant, for example getting Hannah kidnapped by samurai warriors so he can learn more about her is certainly a different approach to dating!

As with any romance, as a reader a happy ending is of course a pre-requisite and don't worry 'The Scarlet Kimono' doesn't fail. But, I would have liked the story to take one more final leap to make me a totally happy reader.

VERDICT:

A very rich and detailed historical book that is both absorbing and fascinating. I love the fact that Christina Courtenay puts a lot of time and research into her books creating a vivid picture of 17th century Japan. Her characters are strong, and well rounded as likeable for the flaws as their perfections. A great read.

Carol W says

Hannah is betrothed to a ghastly man, Mr Hesketh. She cannot bear the thought of her future with this man and decides to stow away on her brother's ship bound for Japan. She manages to hide her identity by posing

as a young boy, which brings problems of it's own.

Meanwhile, in Japan, Taro Kumashiro marries a beautiful woman, but she loves another. Taro's adviser and seer has a vision of a woman visiting, on a ship, who could bring danger.

When the ship docks in Japan, Hannah, still undiscovered as a woman, is rumbled by a local and is kidnapped by warriors.

What is to be Hannah's fate in this foreign land and in the disguise of a young boy?

This fast paced, action packed story was exciting from the first chapter. Bravery in the toughest of situations, relationships, love and loss. A mix of emotions, all captured in a gripping storyline.

Well researched and full of interesting detail about early trading ships discovering Japan and the traditions of both England and Japan at that time. i enjoyed reading about the different traditions and lifestyles.

I really enjoyed this novel. The Haiku was a lovely touch.

* Choclit Publishers kindly sent me a copy of this novel for review. This did not influence my review in any way.

MAP says

This was a book with a lot of potential that unfortunately had too many faults and cliches to elevate it to a "good" book. It is set in 16th century Japan, and it's clear the author has done her homework. However, the problems ultimately outweighed the good. Such as:

- 1) why the magical realism aspect with Sensei Yanagihara? Was there no other way for the characters to meet?
- 2) "white lady abduction by handsome foreigner who she eventually falls in love with" is not only an overused trope, but one that squicks me out on a racist and sexist level.
- 3) Lady Reiko wasn't a character, she was a plot mover. Lack of motives and crazy for the sake of crazy is really frustrating. One or two sentences giving her a reason would have made things infinitely better.

Ultimately, despite the well-researched setting and vivid descriptions, this book didn't make itself stand out from any other romance novel written in the last 20 years. And I went into this book wanting (and feeling I was promised) historical fiction and cultural exploration, not romance.

Blodeuedd Finland says

My thoughts:

Hanna Marston was not as pretty as her older sister and therefore her family didn't care about her, and wanted her to marry some old guy with 5 kids. Something that Hannah did not want so what does she do, oh

yes she hides on her brother's ship that is sailing for Japan. I did like that she had the guts to do that. But as always, come on, are men really that stupid that they do not see that she is a girl, she was like there for 2 years or something. This is a common trope in books so I am used to it, but still it just makes me think men are fools.

Anyway she hid and she even learnt Japanese from the cook. Smart girl! So ok the rest were fools, but she and the cook who was Japanese were smart, lol. Which brings us to Japan. This is where the story gets good, because it's a premise I really enjoy. She gets abducted by a handsome warlord because his seer has seen Hannah in his visions. Of course the rest finds foreigners ugly but Taro is smitten by Hannah and she is finds him attractive too. And yes I do like the whole abducting a bride thing. Because he is a perfect gentleman, he asks her to teach him English and he treats her with respect, and he wants her whatever anyone else says. A romance is blossoming.

To the rest of the cast then, there is the wicked Lady Reiko who wants Taro for herself and is prepared to do anything. There is Captain Rydon and her brother Jacob, but honestly they are so much in the background so who cares. This is Hannah's story and her struggle. But she never sees it as a struggle. She holds her head high, she has respect for all, and when Taro says she is beautiful she gains self-respect too.

The book has romance, drama (a book always need a bitchy woman), and culture clashes, I liked those of you can say it like that. The Japanese finds the foreigners ugly and weird because the English never bathe. It was interesting to see a romance set in this time.

Conclusion:

The story was the best part of this book. She is the first English woman to ever set foot in Japan, and then a handsome warlord takes fancy to her. I do like doomed love.

Jewel says

This book might have been better for me if I didn't have such high expectations for it. From reading the plot at the back I thought this will be epic!!!! One of those that sweep you away to a different place and time!!! Not the case.

When I started reading it I didn't care much for the Herione I thought she was more like a spoiled teen!! And I thought it was really irritating and OLD, for her family to care more for "the not so good and virtuous" older sibling.

The writing style came to me as a bit immature, didn't care much for it, it was more telling than showing, we were told about every single thing, the H was angry, but me as a reader didn't really feel it. A lot of things happened in the book that were so convenient, the hero's seer foretold the Herione's coming, the Herione finding herself on a ship for two years with a Japanese cook, who taught her the language and the customs. More examples would be giving away the book.

I don't also understand why all the "westerns" had something wrong with them, except for our really smart and clean Herione.

The book had some good moments as well, but it felt more like a manga to me. The Japanese history was good but not enough for me, I think I knew it all and wanted more.

I'm not really in the mood for writing this review, but if I ever have a chance i might revise it.

Monica *can't read fast enough*** says**

I generally enjoyed this story, but I do wish that the story was a little more detailed. Review to come.

Teresa says

Firstly, I don't really read historicals. It's not that I don't want to read them, I just don't seem to choose them - if that makes sense. The last historical I read was Anne Rice's 'The Feast Of All Saints', and although interesting to read the about 19th Century New Orleans and the *gen de colors*, I used to be able to put the book down and forget about it. Maybe it lacked romance?

However, I won this book through Choc Lit's Flavour of The Month Award in February (2011) and the minute I started reading I could never forget about it. I begrudgenly would have to put it down, real life getting in the way.

For the first third of the book the hero (Taro) and heroine (Hannah) don't meet. But you know they will, it is their fate. The *sensei* (Taro's seer) has seen it.

We see two lives unfolding, one in Japan and another in England (then at sea). We go from one culture to the other in the 17th Century - and for me it was believable.

I loved the development of Hannah's relationship with Hoji - the ship's 'Chinaman'. Hannah really was an endearing character. (I think maybe this was because for a modern day woman we have so many more choices and freedom - equality). She's intelligent, well mannered with her upbringing, yet not ignorant, which serves in her favour. But she's tough, stubborn and a fighter for what she wants/believes - otherwise she wouldn't be stowed away on a ship pretending to be a boy!

Through Taro's patience with his wife, and her intolerable sister, Lady Reiko, you learn he's a fair, patient man with very attractive qualities - Oh boy, did I LOVE Taro! He is a good man. (I have a theory about Lady Hasuko and her behaviour, which wasn't quite answered in the book but can't mention it here, for it would be a spoiler... but happy to discuss with anyone who has read this book to see if you came to the same conclusion).

Towards the end, I felt there could have been some more emotion enforced - especially when Hannah's life is truly in danger - I would have liked to have sensed more fear, but it is a small nit in the grand scheme of things with this book. I just enjoyed it for easy reading, a conflicted romance, a loveable heroine and a fanciable and very attractive Japanese hero! (Why is fanciable not in the dictionary?)

Right, off to add Trade Winds on my to-read list!

Grace Elliot says

I bought this book on impulse after reading a good review and wasn't disappointed.

Set in the early 17th century the book starts by switching viewpoints between Hannah, a conventional English girl, and the hero, a Japanese Warlord.

As the book progresses Hannah stows away on her brother's ship and arrives in Japan disguised as a boy. However the Warlord's seer has foreseen her arrival as a life-changing event, and so the Warlord is constantly on the watch for a flame-haired foreigner.

This is an intriguing love story where preconceptions are laid aside and love allowed to grow despite huge gulfs in culture. Hannah definitely changes the life of the Warlord but not in the way he anticipated.

'The Scarlet Kimono' held me from start to finish and I will definitely be looking out for more books by this author.

Tara Chevreton says

I really enjoyed this. It's a well-told story. I was highly entertained. Both the hero and heroine have alternating scenes and I liked them both. (That's highly unusual for me. I rarely like the man parts, but I like all of this.)

In England, there is Hannah. She is about to be wed to a man she does not love. She dons male attire and boards a ship headed for Japan.

In Japan there is a Lord, Kumashiro, who is wed to a woman who doesn't love him.

While Hannah's ship gets ever closer to Kumashiro, she befriends a Japanese man and embraces Japanese culture before she even sets foot on the land. Meanwhile, Kumashiro has drama in his castle to deal with and the loss of a loved one.

Hannah and Kuma meet and take a mutual interest in each other, but their love must first survive an unwanted husband, an evil sister-in-law, an earthquake, more than one abduction, and the strongest obstacle of all: different cultures.

There is no end to the excitement and the romance was never cheesy like in some romance novels. The sex scenes were also brief and not peppered with ridiculous words.

Loved it. Absolutely devoured every word. I liked it so much that 100 pages into it, I bought the author's other work, Trade Winds.

Josette says

I've just finished reading this, and have to say I was a little disappointed. From reading the description - and other people's thoughts - I was expecting a grand, sweeping historical romance, but the whole thing just felt a bit flat.

The plot, in a nutshell, is this: 17th Century England, and our heroine, Hannah, faces a bleak future; she's virtually invisible in an uncaring and unsympathetic household where her older, more beautiful sister has always taken precedence; and to top it all off, she is betrothed to a man she abhors. Her elder brother sets sail for Japan on business, and Hannah - seeing this as her only means of escape - stows away on board. Once she arrives in Japan, she is promptly kidnapped by a powerful feudal lord, who has been warned of her coming by his most trusted advisor and seer (who seems to see her as a threat because she has red hair). Hannah, being the precocious, feisty young thing that the author would have us believe she is, gets into many scrapes here and there, and eventually falls in love with her kidnapper, and he with her.

Sound promising? I thought so, but unfortunately this book and I were not meant to be. The whole thing felt pretty rushed...weeks go by in a couple of lines, and on many occasions we are told things in a matter-of-fact way (when Hannah is scared, when Hannah is happy), but are never really shown these things in any great detail. The dialogue, also, feels pretty awkward and clunky for the most part...and MODERN, which jars a bit with the 17th Century setting. I really did want to like this book - the fact that I read it to the bitter end is testament to that - but I just didn't feel any emotional depth from, or attachment to, any of the characters. Granted, the passages describing Japanese culture and tradition were interesting, but not quite interesting enough to salvage the rest of the book - in my eyes, anyway.

Yes, I know, it's one of those books where you have to suspend disbelief and go with the flow, but that's the beauty of great fiction: No matter how implausible the idea of it may seem, if it's well-written with rounded characters and good dialogue, it makes you believe, no matter what. Unfortunately, this book just didn't do that for me.

Kathryn says

I absolutely loved this book. Having thoroughly enjoyed Christina's debut novel, *Trade Winds*, I was really looking forward to reading *The Scarlet Kimono* and, happily, it exceeded my expectations.

Christina is an incredibly versatile writer. She switches effortlessly from describing 17th Century life in a samurai *daimyo* or lord's castle in Northern Japan to English family life, and from the bustle of a busy port, be it Plymouth in England or Hirado in Japan, to covering life on board a merchant sailing vessel in between. Her attention to detail is incredible and, as a result, I felt as if I were right in the middle of the action, shadowing the characters, which is where I hope every book will take me.

As for the characters, Taro Kumashiro is an unusual romantic hero at first sight but he's also irresistible: a powerful Japanese warrior lord in command of thousands of men, who is honourable, fierce, brave and loyal, but also fair, deeply intelligent and attractive. His *sensei* or adviser, Yanagihara, is a wonderful creation, who imparts a sense of foreboding when he sees Hannah's approach in a vision but is also a calming centre for Taro and gave this reader a real insight into Japanese philosophy on life and fate.

As for the heroine, Hannah Marston is a young English girl, who has impulsively stowed aboard one of her father's ships rather than be forced into a loveless arranged marriage. She's headstrong and wilful but also intelligent, kind and compassionate. She has an openness and willingness to learn that will not only help her as she adjusts to life at sea but also prepare her to fully experience a new country, its people and culture in contrast to her fellow countrymen. To help her in this, she has the wonderful Hoji-san, who has to serve the Ship's Captain until he saves his life and can be freed, and acts as Hannah's *sensei*. I felt that I learnt a lot about Japanese culture and customs so that, like Hannah, I was similarly prepared when her ship docked and the action shifted to Japan.

Christina's love of Japan, its people, culture and customs, shines through in this book and, ultimately, I think there are two love stories in this novel: the one between Taro and Hannah, with its clash of personalities, cultures and attitudes; and then there's the one for Japan and all things Japanese. It's a richer and more rewarding reading experience for having both and I'd urge you to take on board provisions and stow away somewhere where you won't be disturbed until you've finished reading this.

LindyLouMac says

This is the third title I have read by Christina Courtenay and I have already come to realise that she is a talented author with a passion for the places that she writes about as well as creating believable characters. The Scarlet Kimono met my expectations of romance and adventure in a historical setting. This time the story is set in 17C Japan and her obvious fascination in Japan shows in the meticulous attention to detail. The culture differences between the UK and Japan are well described and I felt that I had learnt a little about Japanese history when I finished the book. In my opinion it is always a bonus to learn something as well enjoy a good romantic adventure.

The heroine of the story is Hannah Marston who to escape an arranged marriage that she is very much against decides to stow away on one of her father's trading ships which is about to depart on an expedition that will take them to Japan and away from the UK for many years. Hannah believes that she will be safe as her brother is part of the expedition crew. Of course nothing is as easy as she had imagined and she finds herself pushed to her limits just to survive the voyage. Once they reach Japan, Hannah decides all the suffering was worthwhile, little does she know her greatest challenges still lie ahead of her. The male protagonist, Taro Kumashiro has been warned of her arrival and that she is a danger of some sort, so he arranges to have kidnapped. However what happens when fear turns to love in the clash of cultures between Hannah and Taro? Survive she does but for the details of how you will have to read the story yourself.

This was a very satisfying read and I think within the genre her novels are well worth reading. If you enjoy historical romance then I recommend you give Christina Courtenay's novels a try. I am already looking forward to the next one.

<http://lindyloumacbookreviews.blogspot...>
