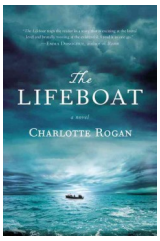
The Lifeboat



view in catalog

Charlotte Rogan's debut novel *The Lifeboat* restores your faith in 21st century writing. In this historical novel, two narratives intertwine: the more dramatic one being the story of the shipwreck of the *Princess Alexandria* during the first months of WWI on a voyage from England to America. The second story is about Grace, a young woman whose family has suffered a financial collapse. Suddenly, needing to make her own way in the world, Grace's choices are narrow: to become a governess or find a rich husband, Grace being resourceful and not wanted to be tied down by a job with long hours and little pay chooses the latter.

She finds her husband material in an unlikely place: the engagement listings of a London society paper. Henry Winter, an American financier, is handsome and rich and works for a company rapidly increasing in power and influence. Amazingly, this part of the plan works. They marry and set off for America. On the ship, as a sign of her newly altered status, Grace and Henry are invited to sit at the captain's table.

But there Grace's good luck ends. For one thing, Henry has not cabled his parents about the marriage, and seems reluctant to do so. His parents send him telegrams about his former fiancee but does she even know that she's become history to him? In the middle of the night the *Empress* mysteriously explodes and the new bride finds herself the last person squeezed onto a lifeboat, and without her husband.

How vividly Charlotte Rogan has imagined the plight of the castaways. Grace and her thirty-nine fellow passengers are soon adrift on the sea with two other lifeboats in view. The one stroke of good luck, Mr. Hardie, a crewmember is with them and takes charge. Though he's domineering and brusque he knows seafaring well. He reassures everyone that they are floating through shipping lanes and will be found in a day or two at most. But why then does he ration the biscuits and water? No matter, Grace is willing to trust him.

But of course not everyone else does. Mrs. Grant and Harriet turn skeptical of his knowledge, his plans, even his past. Does he have a dark secret--an earlier crime, for instance-- that he won't reveal? Why does he refuse to paddle near a lifeboat commandeered by his fellow shipmate, Bly?

The interpersonal drama that Rogan creates soon turns mesmerizing as a storm threatens the castaways. The living conditions, the food including a captured large raw fish, the burned faces and seriously chapped lips all are very believable.

When the lifeboat story gets almost too claustrophobic and brutal, Rogan switches back to Grace and Henry's personal story. It's a fantastic book; full of the drama of being human and showing how quickly humans lose their social veneer under pressure. Without food, without water, we become competitors fighting against each other to survive.

Two other interesting shipwreck novels are *Alias Grace* by Margaret Atwood and *The Dressmaker* by Kate Alcott which is set about the same time period and involves the sinking of the Titanic.

Posted by Dory L. on January 30, 2013

Blogs:

- For the Love of Reading [6]
- Information, Answers & Reviews [7]

Reviews Subjects:

- Fiction [8]
- Historical [9]
- World War I [10]

Reviews Titles:

- The Lifeboat [11]

Links

[1] http://monroe.lib.in.us/blogs/love-reading/lifeboat-0
[2] https://mcpl.monroe.lib.in.us/search/searchresults.aspx?type=Boolean&term=isbn~9780316185905%20or%20upc~9780316185905&by=KW&sort=RELEVANCE?utm_source=blogpost&utm_medium=publicsite&utm_campaign=blogpost
[3] http://mcpl.monroe.lib.in.us/search/searchresults.aspx?cbx=1.1033.0.0.7&type=Keyword&term=lifeboat%20organ&by=KW&sort=RELEVANCE&limit=TOM=*&query=&page=0
[4] http://mcpl.monroe.lib.in.us/search/searchresults.aspx?cbx=1.1033.0.0.7&type=Keyword&term=alias%20grace%20atwood&by=KW&sort=RELEVANCE&limit=TOM=*&query=&page=0
[5] http://mcpl.monroe.lib.in.us/search/searchresults.aspx?cbx=1.1033.0.0.7&type=Keyword&term=dressmaker%20alcott&by=KW&sort=RELEVANCE&limit=TOM=*&query=&page=0
[6] http://monroe.lib.in.us/booklsblog
[7] http://monroe.lib.in.us/category/blogs/information-answers-reviews
[8] http://monroe.lib.in.us/category/reviews-subjects/fiction
[9] http://monroe.lib.in.us/category/reviews-subjects/historical
[10] http://monroe.lib.in.us/category/reviews-subjects/world-war-i
[11] http://monroe.lib.in.us/reviews-titles/1607