

Kathleen Ernst
WRITING AT THE INTERSECTION OF PEOPLE, PLACES, AND THE PAST



Preview of *Meet Caroline*

Caroline Abbott: An American Girl – Book One

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Caroline Abbott is doing what she loves most—sailing on Lake Ontario with Papa—when her world turns upside down. A British officer boards their sloop, announces that Britain and America are at war, and takes her father prisoner. As Papa is led away, Caroline promises him that she will stay strong and steady until he returns. She tries hard to keep her promise by helping Mama run the family’s shipyard. Then the British attack her village, and it looks as if the American side is in trouble. Can Caroline stay steady enough to help win the day?

Chapter One – A Fine Sloop

Caroline Abbott leaned over the rail and laughed with delight. “Isn’t this wonderful?” she asked her cousin Lydia. Sailing on Lake Ontario was fun any time, but being permitted to come aboard the sloop *White Gull* on its very first voyage was an extra-special treat.

“It’s marvelous,” Lydia agreed. “I’m glad that Oliver and your papa invited us.”

Caroline’s father had built the *White Gull* for Oliver, Lydia’s older brother.

“You’re lucky to get command of such a fine little sloop,” Caroline told Oliver, who was steering the ship.

“*White Gull* still belongs to your father,” Oliver reminded her. “It will take me some time to earn enough money to pay him back.” His voice dropped. “I just hope America doesn’t decide to go to war with Great Britain before I can do so,” he muttered.

“Let’s not talk about that today!” Lydia said impatiently.



Caroline felt impatient, too. She'd listened to adults arguing about whether America should declare war on Great Britain all her life. Caroline didn't want a war. She didn't even want to *think* about a war.

The breeze whipped some strands of hair into Oliver's face. He paused to retie his hair behind his neck. "It's been thirty years since America won its independence from Britain. Maybe President Madison can avoid fighting another war."

Caroline wanted to change the conversation from war to a happier topic. "Now that the sloop is finished, you can sail all around Lake Ontario!"

Oliver grinned. "I'm looking forward to buying and selling goods along the lakeshore. It's a fine way to earn a living."

"You can start by buying some embroidery silk for me!" Caroline said.

Oliver shook his head. "Mistress Abbott, I will gladly haul sailcloth and tar for your father, and apples and potatoes for farmers. I will happily carry mail, and take passengers wherever they wish to go. But surely you cannot expect me to shop for embroidery silk!"

Caroline smiled mischievously. "I need something of a reddish brown. Like cinnamon, but with more red."

Lydia giggled as Oliver made a face.

"And *then*, some lace," Caroline continued. "Mama is helping me make a new dress for my tenth birthday. A bit of new lace would be perfect."

"Enough teasing," Oliver begged. "I'm a merchant, not a lady's maid!"

"Why do you think I'm teasing?" Caroline asked. She held her head up high, the way Lydia did when she was pretending to be a fancy lady. Lydia, who was almost twelve, giggled even harder.

"Oliver?" Papa called in his no-nonsense captain voice. "Watch that you stay on course. And you girls—remember to stay clear of the mainsail."



We'll stay clear," Caroline promised. Really, Papa didn't need to remind her about every little thing! She'd been born on the shore of Lake Ontario, and she'd been sailing with him for as long as she could remember. Papa was the finest shipbuilder on all the Great Lakes. And one day. . .

"What are you thinking about?" Lydia asked. "You have a dreamy look on your face."

Caroline hesitated before bursting out with it. "One day, I'm going to ask Papa to build *me* a sloop. I'll be captain." It was her most precious wish, one she usually kept tucked away in her heart.

Beneath her bonnet, Lydia's eyes went wide with surprise. "You can't be captain of a ship!"

"I *shall* be," Caroline insisted. "After I finish learning to be a good sailor. Would you like to be on my crew? We'll sail all the way to China!"

"China!" Lydia squealed. Neither girl had traveled farther than back and forth across Lake Ontario.

"Yes, China," Caroline declared. "We'll visit the markets there and bring back gifts for our families."

Lydia shook her head. "I don't think I want to go to China," she said. "I want to get married and live in a fine house in Kingston and have six children. All girls."

"Well, then, I will have to bring back *lots* of gifts," Caroline said. "Dolls and fancy combs and pretty bowls for your daughters' oatmeal."

"And a silk shawl for me?" Lydia asked.

"Yes," Caroline promised. Then she turned to look at Oliver. He stood at the back of the boat with feet braced. He leaned into the tiller, a long wooden bar used to steer the ship. The breeze ruffled his hair as he looked over the lake.

Caroline couldn't hold in a little sigh. There was no finer feeling than being on



board a sloop on a fair day. Sailing made Caroline feel as free as one of the gulls soaring overhead! She had tried not to envy Oliver while the men at Papa's shipyard built *White Gull*. It had been difficult, though. Sometimes envy sat in her chest like a cold, hard lump.

"Wind's shifting," Papa called.

"Yes, sir." Oliver said. He edged the tiller over a little farther. The sails made satisfying snapping sounds as the heavy cloth caught the breeze. Since the ship held no cargo today, it skimmed lightly over the waves.

"Caroline, what direction is the wind coming from?" Papa asked.

Caroline closed her eyes, trying to tune her senses to the day as Papa had taught her. She could smell the water, and the faint tang of newly dried paint, and the heavier scent of tar. She heard waves slapping the ship's hull, and the familiar rattle of the lines that controlled the sails, and the steady creaking of wooden timbers beneath her feet. And she felt the wind against her face.

She opened her eyes. "The wind's from the west, Papa!" she called.

He nodded. Caroline felt the lump of envy in her chest melt away. *I can make Papa proud of me*, she thought. If she kept learning all she could about sailing, perhaps one day he would build her a sloop of her very own.

"I feel as if we're flying," Lydia exclaimed. She leaned over the rail, watching the water rush by below. "We might as well be on a flying carpet!"

"*White Gull* is certainly colorful enough to be taken for one," Papa grumbled.

Caroline hid her smile. Papa liked to paint his ships a plain gray. After many discussions, though, Oliver had convinced Papa to paint this ship bright blue, red, and yellow. Oliver wanted his future customers to recognize his ship easily, even from far away.

Lydia straightened and tugged the brim of her sunbonnet. "It is very bright



today," she complained.

"I like it." Caroline tipped her head back so that she could feel the June sunshine on her face. The winters in northern New York were long and cold. Caroline didn't see what harm it did to enjoy the sunshine while they had it.

"Young ladies must protect their skin from the sun," Lydia said.

Caroline sighed. Lydia sounded as prim as Mrs. Shaw, a neighbor who was fond of finding fault with Caroline. Lately, Lydia had started acting as if she wanted to be all grown up. Caroline wished Lydia would forget about fancy manners—at least for a little while. She reached inside the small knitted bag she'd carried on board. "Look what I brought!" She pulled out a small top, made of wood and painted green.

"Can we play with it on board?" Lydia asked doubtfully. The girls had spent many hours practicing with it on land, perfecting their ability to make the top spin.

"We can try," Caroline said. "Let's go up near the bow. That's the front," she added, remembering that Lydia didn't know ships as well as she did. "And don't forget—always keep one hand on the rail for safety."

After making their way forward, the girls sat down a short distance apart. Caroline paused, feeling the deck tilt back and forth beneath her. She tried to time her spin, aiming the top so that it would travel down the slope to Lydia.

"Got it!" Lydia cried, snatching the top before it wobbled out of reach. "Now let me try."

With some practice, both girls were soon using the ship's movement to help send the top exactly where they wanted it to go. Caroline grinned when Lydia pushed her bonnet back to get a better view of the top spinning across the deck. Maybe Lydia wasn't *quite* ready to be all grown up after all.

Papa interrupted Caroline's thoughts. "Are you paying attention to the wind?"



he called to Oliver. "You need to change the mainsail."

"Yes, sir," Oliver answered. "I'll do it."

Caroline paused. She knew that sailors had to be aware every minute of the way the changing wind affected the sails. They used the wind to keep the ship heading where they wanted to go. Papa had decided that *White Gull* needed to change course.

"No more play for now," she told Lydia. "Hang on, and stay down!" The girls squeezed against the rail, well out of the way.

Papa stationed himself by the ropes that helped control the huge sail. Oliver began shouting commands that any sailor would understand: "Prepare to jibe! Trim the sheet!"

He's trying to sound like your father," Lydia whispered.

And one day, Caroline thought, I shall be the one giving those commands.

Oliver pushed the tiller hard and let the mainsail begin its swing far out over the water. The sloop shuddered as the wind hit the loose sail. Caroline instinctively clenched the rail with both hands. The top slipped from her fingers. It skittered across the tilting deck.

"Oh!" Caroline gasped. As she reached to grab the toy, she felt the rail slip from the fingers of her other hand. Suddenly she too was skidding across the slanting deck.

"*Caroline!*" Papa bellowed. Oliver shouted a warning. Lydia screamed.

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