Banishing Verona: A Novel

by Margot Livesey

About the Book

A couple begins an intense affair, only to be separated abruptly-and perhaps irrevocably-in this surprising, suspenseful love story.

Zeke is twenty-nine, a man who looks like a Raphael angel and who earns his living as a painter and carpenter in London. He reads the world a little differently from most people and has trouble with such ordinary activities as lying, deciphering expressions, recognizing faces. Verona is thirty-seven, confident, hot-tempered, a modestly successful radio show host, unmarried, and seven months pregnant. When the two meet in a house that Zeke is renovating, they fall in love, only to be separated less than twenty-four hours later when Verona leaves abruptly, without explanation, for Boston.

Both Zeke and Verona, it turns out, have complications in their lives, though not of a romantic kind. Verona's involve her brother, Henry, who is tied up in shady financial dealings. Zeke's father has had a heart attack and his mother is threatening to run away with her lover, all of which puts pressure on Zeke to take over the family grocery business. And yet he finds himself following Verona to Boston. As he pursues her, and she pursues Henry, both are forced to ask the perplexing question: Can we ever know another person?

Deftly plotted and filled with unexpected twists, **Banishing Verona** marks the arrival of another lyrical and wise novel from a writer whose work "radiates with compassion and intelligence and always, deliciously, mystery" (Alice Sebold).

Discussion Guide

1. What makes Verona flee after the first night she spends with Zeke? Why does she nail her clothes to the floor? How does Zeke understand this gesture?

2. Zeke often feels ill at ease with other people yet in less than forty-eight hours he falls in love with Verona. Why does he respond to her so strongly? Verona is seven months pregnant and the host of a radio show. What attracts her to a man who paints houses for a living and can't tell jokes?

3. How does Zeke function in the world? Why is restoring antique clocks the perfect hobby for him and why does he think that the clocks amplify his spirit? Zeke tells a nurse that his feelings stay constant as cathedrals. (p.34) Is this true? How does he cope with the fact that other people are less reliable? What caused his breakdown?

4. One of Henry's teachers claims that he was born without a conscience but Henry insists that he does have a conscience, he just ignores it. What sort of a man is Henry? How does he rationalize what he does with his grandfather's will? Verona says she and Henry share the same corrupt moral gene. (p.200) Do you agree? Why does Verona feel such a sense of responsibility to Henry when he clearly thinks only about himself?

5. Verona, Zeke and Toby each earn their living doing something they would probably do even if they weren't paid. How is Henry's attitude to money different? How does this affect his relationship with his sister, his best friend and the woman he hopes to marry?

6. After Verona loses her temper when she burns the carrots, she asks Zeke what makes him angry-what does? On p. 186 Verona says that it is easier to be furious than to acknowledge what the fury conceals. How does this illuminate her approach to life so far?

7. Zeke believes that his mother regards him as "broken beyond fixing." Is this really how Gwen sees him? To what extent does her behavior exacerbate his difficulties? What is the nature of Zeke's disorder? Does the novel suggest that his difficulties also have their rewards?

8. Zeke is described as looking like a Raphael angel and Henry is referred to as beautiful. How do these two very different men relate to their appearance? What else do they have in common that attracts Verona to Zeke?

9. What makes Zeke decide to tell his father about his mother's infidelity? Was this the right choice? What are Zeke's responsibilities towards his parents?

10. Gwen puts Zeke in the middle of her relationship to Maurice, and makes him feel guilty about not working in the grocery store. What are the consequences of her manipulation?

11. Jill and Zeke both feel out of place in America. Would they have become friends if they had met in London? What do they have in common besides being visitors to a foreign country?

12. On p. 317 Verona observes that she is not trying to find Zeke literally, but rather the part of him that cares for her. Why does she repeatedly fail to contact Zeke when she is in America?

13. Near the end of the novel Verona tells Zeke about a princess who is immune to gravity except when she swims in the palace lake. What does Verona hope to suggest by telling this story?

14. What does the title **Banishing Verona** refer to? What does Zeke mean at the end of the novel when he says that he'll

'try'? Is there a future for Zeke and Verona?

Author Bio

Margot Livesey was born and grew up on the edge of the Scottish Highlands. She is the author of a collection of stories and 10 novels, including EVA MOVES THE FURNITURE, THE FLIGHT OF GEMMA HARDY, THE BOY IN THE FIELD and THE ROAD FROM BELHAVEN. She has received awards from the NEA, the Guggenheim Foundation and the Radcliffe Institute. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts and is on the faculty of the Iowa Writers? Workshop.

Critical Praise

"**Banishing Verona** is like all Livesey's novels: notable for her penetrating knowledge of the human heart coupled with respect for its essential mysteries, both explored in elegant, evocative prose."

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