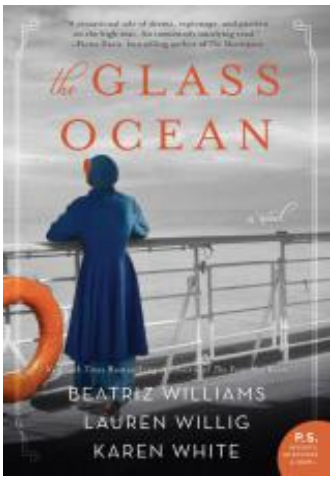
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

The Glass Ocean

by Beatriz Williams, Lauren Willig, and Karen White



About the Book

From the *New York Times* bestselling authors of THE FORGOTTEN ROOM comes a captivating historical mystery, infused with romance, that links the lives of three women across a century --- two deep in the past, one in the present --- to the doomed passenger liner, RMS *Lusitania*.

May 2013
Her finances are in dire straits, and bestselling author Sarah Blake is struggling to find a big idea for her next book. Desperate, she breaks the one promise she made to her Alzheimer?s-stricken mother and opens an old chest that belonged to her great-grandfather, who died when the RMS *Lusitania* was sunk by a German U-Boat in 1915. What she discovers there could change history. Sarah embarks on an ambitious journey to England to enlist the help of John Langford, a recently disgraced Member of Parliament whose family archives might contain the only key to the long-ago catastrophe.

April 1915
Southern belle Caroline Telfair Hochstetter?s marriage is in crisis. Her formerly attentive industrialist husband, Gilbert, has become remote, preoccupied with business, and something else that she can?t quite put a finger on. She?s hoping a trip to London in *Lusitania*?s lavish first-class accommodations will help them reconnect --- but she can?t ignore the spark she feels for her old friend, Robert Langford, who turns out to be on the same voyage. Feeling restless and longing for a different existence, Caroline is determined to stop being a bystander, and take charge of her own life.

Tessa Fairweather is traveling second-class on the *Lusitania*, returning home to Devon. Or at least, that?s her story. Tessa has never left the United States, and her English accent is a hasty fake. She?s really Tennessee Schaff, the daughter of a roving con man, and she can steal and forge just about anything. But she?s had enough. Her partner has promised that if they can pull off this one last heist aboard the *Lusitania*, they?ll finally leave the game behind. Tess desperately wants to believe that, but has the uneasy feeling there?s something about this job that isn?t as it seems.

As the *Lusitania* steams toward its fate, three women work against time to unravel a plot that will change the course of their own lives, and history itself.

Discussion Guide

1. When we first see Tess, she?s posing as an Irish maid, and then on the *Lusitania* she?s an English country girl returning home. How does Tess pull off each persona? Do we see other characters assuming roles that aren?t entirely genuine?

2. Caroline?s husband Gilbert is embarrassed by her hint that she might like to make love: ?You?re so refined. And when you act...like that, it makes me think that my coarser upbringing has somehow rubbed off on you like so much coal dust.? Caroline is infuriated. Were you? What does this scene tell us about their partnership?

3. Tess tells us her father?s golden rule: ?When in doubt, run. It didn?t much matter where you were running to, just so long as you kept going. And going. Because while you were running, you couldn?t think of where you?d come from or where you might land.? Is this good advice? Has this rule served Tess well?

4. When she begins her research into the Langford family history, Sarah assures John Langford that he can trust her. Should he? What are her motives? What are his?

5. What do you make of Caroline and Robert?s love affair? Did you expect them to end up together after they survive the sinking of the *Lusitania*?

6. Sarah tells John Langford that her mother?s dementia gives her a great sense of urgency: ?I need to know the truth, I need to know everything before it?s too late. You?re always better off knowing.? Do you believe that too? What consequences were there to uncovering the truth about the *Lusitania*, and the Langfords?

7. Caroline remembers ?what her mother had taught her about being a woman: Appear to be weak and docile when it suites, but never forget that a soft and gentle outer appearance simply masks a spine of steel.? Did that make sense for women in 1915? What about today?

8. In the Epilogue, Sarah says ?We?re all looking for something, aren?t we? Every last one of us looking in vain, looking with futile, unassailable hope for something we?ve lost.? Was this true for the characters in this novel? Which ones find what they?re looking for? Which were disappointed?

9. Were you satisfied with how things turned out for each of the heroines? Whose life took the most surprising twist? Would you have rewritten the ending for any of them?

Author Bio

Beatriz Williams is the *New York Times*, *USA Today* and internationally bestselling author of HUSBANDS & LOVERS, THE SUMMER WIVES, THE SECRET LIFE OF VIOLET GRANT, A HUNDRED SUMMERS, the *Wicked City* series, and several other works of historical fiction, including five novels in collaboration with fellow bestselling authors Karen White and Lauren Willig.

A graduate of Stanford University with an MBA in Finance from Columbia University, Beatriz worked as a communications and corporate strategy consultant in New York and London before her first novel was published in 2012. Beatriz?s books have won numerous awards, have been translated into more than a dozen languages, and appear regularly in bestseller lists around the world. Her essays have appeared in magazines such as *Real Simple* and *Southern Living*, among others, and she regularly reviews fiction for the *New York Times Book Review*.

Born in Seattle, Washington, Beatriz now lives in southeastern Connecticut with her husband and four mostly grown children.

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