

The Glass Ocean

by Beatriz Williams, Lauren Willig, and Karen White

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?

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Beatriz Williams

A graduate of Stanford University with an MBA from Columbia, Beatriz Williams spent several years in New York and London hiding her early attempts at fiction, first on company laptops as a communications strategy consultant, and then as an at-home producer of small persons before her career as a writer took off. She lives with her husband and four children near the Connecticut shore.

Lauren Willig

Lauren Willig is the New York Times and USA Today bestselling author of the Pink Carnation series and several stand-alone works of historical fiction, including THE ASHFORD AFFAIR, THAT SUMMER, THE OTHER DAUGHTER, THE ENGLISH WIFE, and the collaborative novels THE FORGOTTEN ROOM and THE GLASS OCEAN. Her books have been translated into over a dozen languages, awarded the RITA, Booksellers Best and Golden Leaf awards, and chosen for the American Library Association's annual list of the best genre fiction. After graduating from Yale University, she embarked on a PhD in History at Harvard before leaving academia to acquire a JD at Harvard Law while authoring her Pink Carnation series of Napoleonic-set novels. She lives in New York City, where she now writes full time

Karen White

Karen White is the New York Times bestselling author of more than 20 novels, including the Tradd Street series, THE NIGHT THE LIGHTS WENT OUT, FLIGHT PATTERNS, THE SOUND OF GLASS, A LONG TIME GONE and THE TIME BETWEEN. She is the co-author of THE FORGOTTEN

ROOM with New York Times bestselling authors Beatriz Williams and Lauren Willig. She grew up in London but now lives with her husband and two children near Atlanta, Georgia.

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By Beatriz Williams, Lauren Willig, and Karen White. Morrow,

Williams, Willig, and White (*The Forgotten Room*) form a spectacularly winning team for this action- and romance-packed historical novel. The story is seamlessly narrated in alternating chapters by two American women aboard the British luxury liner *Lusitania* on its fateful final cruise in 1915 and by a 21st-century writer trying to unearth a family secret.

“What a story they told,” writes struggling author Sarah, whose great-grandfather was a steward on the doomed passenger ship, while surveying the intriguing belongings returned after the ocean liner was torpedoed by a German U-boat. Convinced the items will lead to a bestseller, Sarah goes to London to enlist the help of John Lanford, the great-grandson of *Lusitania* survivor and spy novelist Robert, to reconstruct a murky conspiracy aboard the ship; they end up testing the boundaries of love and trust.

The other richly drawn narrations are provided from aboard the *Lusitania* itself by Southern beauty Caroline, who is sailing with her secretive industrialist husband, Gilbert, and by steerage passenger Tess, pressed into a high-risk forgery by her con artist sister, Ginny. The story toggles effortlessly between timelines, building romance and intrigue to a hellish climax at the *Lusitania*’s sinking—and to the completion of a book Sarah never intended to write 100 years later. The result is an “unputdownable” thriller.

Lusitania
British ship

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica

Lusitania, British ocean liner, the sinking of which by a German U-boat on May 7, 1915, contributed indirectly to the entry of the United States into World War I.

The Lusitania, which was owned by the Cunard Line, was built to compete for the highly lucrative transatlantic passenger trade. Construction began in 1904, and, after completion of the hull and main superstructure, the Lusitania was launched on June 7, 1906. The liner was completed the following year, at which time it was the largest ship in the world, measuring some 787 feet (240 metres) in length and weighing approximately 31,550 tons; it was surpassed the following year by its sister ship, the Mauretania. Although luxurious, the Lusitania was noted more for its speed. On September 7, 1907, the ship made its maiden voyage, sailing from Liverpool, England, to New York City. The following month it won the Blue Riband for fastest Atlantic crossing, averaging nearly 24 knots. The Mauretania would later claim the Blue Riband, and the two ships regularly vied for the honour.

Lusitania

Lusitania

The British ocean liner Lusitania was sunk by a German U-boat on May 7, 1915.

Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc./Kenny Chmielewski and Christine McCabe

In May 1915 the Lusitania was returning from New York to Liverpool with 1,959 passengers and crew on board. The sinkings of merchant ships off the south coast of Ireland and reports of submarine activity there prompted the British Admiralty to warn the Lusitania to avoid the area and to recommend adopting the evasive tactic of zigzagging,

changing course every few minutes at irregular intervals to confuse any attempt by U-boats to plot her course for torpedoing. The ship's captain, William Thomas Turner, chose to ignore these recommendations, and on the afternoon of May 7 the vessel was attacked. A torpedo struck and exploded amidships on the starboard side, and a heavier explosion followed, possibly caused by damage to the ship's steam engines and pipes. Within 20 minutes the Lusitania had sunk, and 1,198 people were drowned. The loss of the liner and so many of its passengers, including 128 U.S. citizens, aroused a wave of indignation in the United States, and it was fully expected that a declaration of war would follow, but the U.S. government clung to its policy of neutrality.

Lusitania

Lusitania

The sinking of the Lusitania, which had been torpedoed by a German U-boat, May 1915.

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The Lusitania was carrying a cargo of rifle ammunition and shells (together about 173 tons), and the Germans, who had circulated warnings that the ship would be sunk, felt themselves fully justified in attacking a vessel that was furthering the war aims of their enemy. The German government also felt that, in view of the vulnerability of U-boats while on the surface and the British announcement of intentions to arm merchant ships, prior warning of potential targets was impractical. On May 13, 1915, the U.S. government sent a note to Berlin expressing an indictment of the principles on which the submarine war was being fought, but this note and two following ones constituted the immediate limit of U.S. reaction to the Lusitania incident. Later, in 1917, however, the United States did cite German submarine warfare as a justification for American entry into the war.