

## The Glass Ocean

William Morrow

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### Introduction

*May 2013*

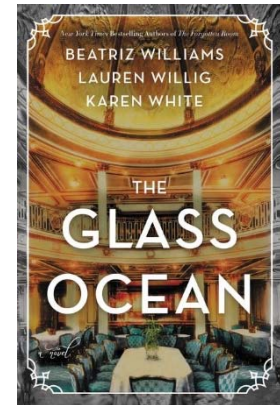
Her finances are in dire straits and bestselling author Sarah Blake is struggling to find a big idea for her next book. Desperate, she breaks the one promise she made to her Alzheimer's-stricken mother and opens an old chest that belonged to her great-grandfather, who died when the RMS *Lusitania* was 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, pre-occupied 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...

### Questions for Discussion

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?