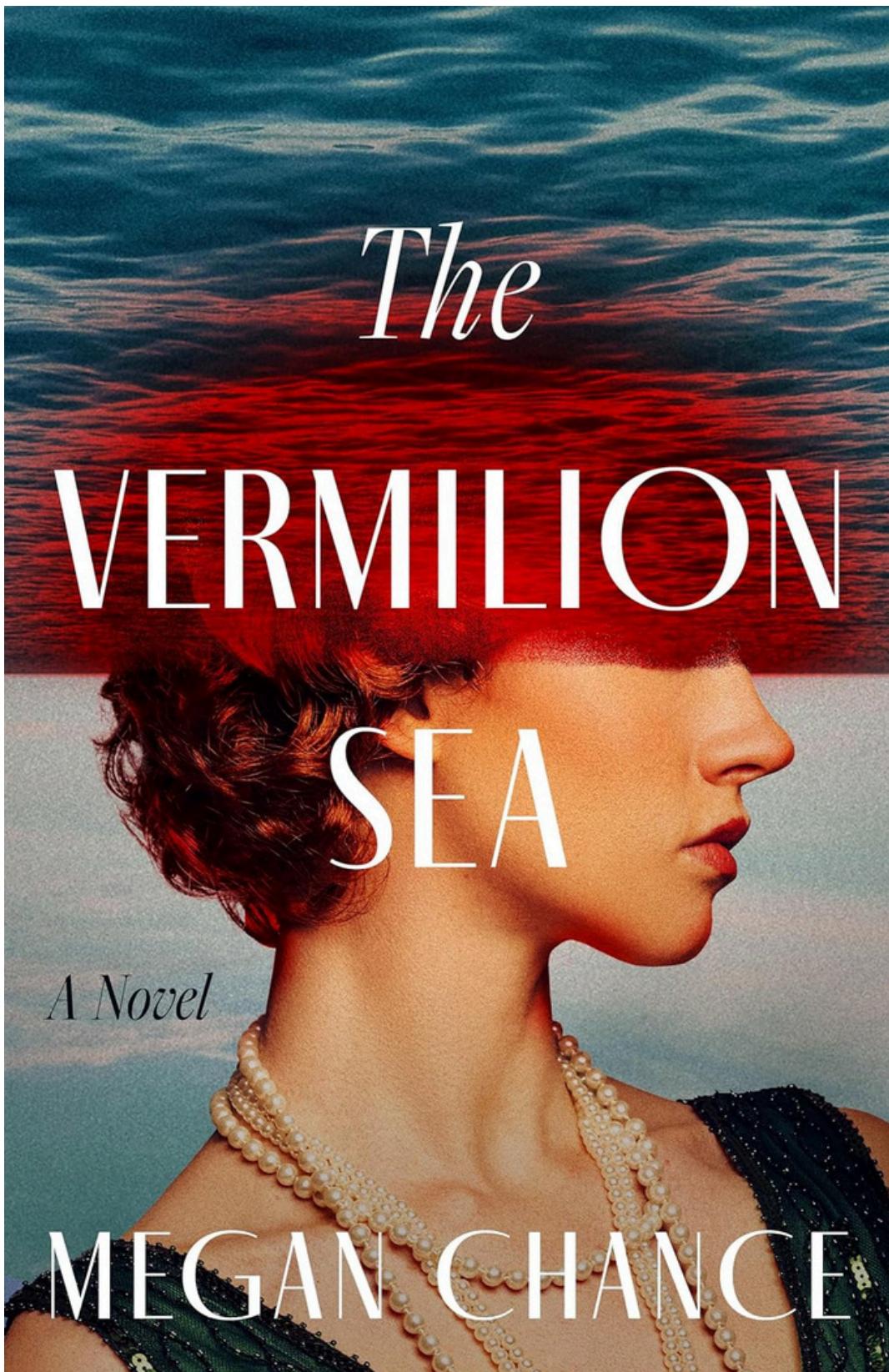


READERS GUIDE



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) Victorine, grieving the loss of her brother, believes she smells her brother's cologne in the air and believes her brother's spirit is there on the ship. How do you think Victorine's beliefs contribute to the events on the *Eurybia*? Do you believe her brother's spirit has anything to do with any of it? Or that the *Eurybia* itself contains a spirit, as Victorine also believes? What of her belief that she hears Emile's spirit speaking through the fish?
- 2) What is your perception of the role that men like James Holloway and their ambitions play in science, and how that affects society? How is James Holloway's quest for "truth" relevant to the ways scientific funding and research works today?
- 3) What Roland did to Billie re: her career was pretty standard when it comes to male/female professional relations of that time. Women who chose careers had to dedicate themselves to those careers, and the cost was a full life—motherhood, family—and even after making that choice, they had to often settle for less-than positions in their careers. How does that compare to today? How are things similar? How have they changed? Do you think Billie's bitterness and anger was too extreme?
- 4) "[William Jennings] Bryan believed the Bible literally, but perhaps being too literal was also Billie's Achilles' heel. She believed the literal truth of what science knew now, but she had not opened her mind to what it might know twenty years from now, fifty, a hundred, of what it could know, of what could prove to be true. Roland was right: Science was the search for the unknown; they learned new things constantly; facts were always evolving—quantum physics showed that. If she lived to be ninety, what would the world have discovered about the living and the dead that might explain the presence she felt in her stateroom, or if Victorine could have called a spirit? What would be discovered about the sentience of fish?" Do you believe, as Roland does, that the unknown is only the as-yet unexplored? By this he means concepts such as God and consciousness. Do you think he's right? What impact do you think discovery—or the lack thereof—would have on religious ideas or faith?
- 5) Roland says stories contain truth at their center. What do you think of this statement?
- 6) Discuss the obliviousness of James and Oliver to the bounty of the sea as anything other than a source of food and trophies, contrasted with Billie's growing awareness of it as something beyond a source of knowledge or research, but as a collective spirit, a community, that reflects not only life on the ship, but life on earth. How do these contrasting perceptions play out in the novel?

7) How does the book play with perception—both with the sea and its mirages and with the ship itself, with people's expectations and motives, with the divisions between the crew and the passengers, science and belief?

8) Maud is a servant on the ship, though her position is above the crew's. She is vulnerable and alone, but in many ways Maud is more resilient than the others. In what ways do Maud's beliefs become crucial to what happens to the novel? What is your opinion of Maud?

9) "It pained her in ways she couldn't articulate, even to herself, having to accept—or even acknowledge—things she would normally have scoffed at. But this place . . . Again she had that feeling of strangeness and truth overlapping, a sense of beauty in the undefined that was so alien to her logical self that she felt turned inside out. What was she to do with any of it?" Have you experienced this sense that Billie feels, of having things you've previously believed being challenged and having to admit that you might be wrong? Discuss.

10) "All because people with their own little fiefdoms had control and wanted to keep it. Incompetent men who triumphed so often over those more talented—not to mention women—that Billie had lost track of how many times she'd seen it. Men who felt so certain in their beliefs that they didn't hesitate to impose them on others. They were everywhere. Billie wondered sometimes how humankind had ever evolved, or if it would ever progress further, given the hold such men had on society. Always . . . always she reminded herself that evolution made no moral judgments. It applied equally to saints and monsters. Parasites evolved to be as complex as their hosts." Have you ever felt what Billie feels? Can you comment on situations today where this is particularly true?

11) Maud says to Billie, "'Some things are beyond explaining, don't you see? They're things we know without having to explain. Haven't you ever just felt something to be true without knowing why?' Billie herself knew that intuition often played a part in both exploration and experimentation. Billie would have said bad luck was a quantifiable thing, cause and effect. Discover the cause, and one could stop it. What was bad luck, really? What was the unexplained?' Do you believe there is something to superstition? Do you think it subconscious knowledge, as Billie does? How do you explain it? How much did it contribute to what happened on the Eurybia? What do you think happened?"

LINKS

Megan Chance website

Pinterest page for *The Vermilion Sea*

Vanderbilt Cruises

Scopes Trial Transcripts

Tiktaalik Roseae

Empedocles

The Sea of Cortez/Gulf of California

RECIPES

MANHATTAN

2 ounces rye whiskey
1 ounce sweet vermouth
2 dashes Angostura bitters
Garnish: brandied cherry (or lemon twist, if preferred)

Instructions:

Mix the rye whiskey, sweet vermouth, and bitters with ice and stir until well-chilled.

Strain into a chilled glass.
Garnish with a brandied cherry (or a lemon twist)

CORPSE REVIVER

$\frac{3}{4}$ oz Gin
 $\frac{3}{4}$ oz Lillet Blanc (or dry vermouth)
 $\frac{3}{4}$ oz Cointreau (or other orange liqueur)
 $\frac{3}{4}$ oz Fresh lemon juice
A dash or rinse of Absinthe

Instructions:

Rinse a chilled coupe or martini glass with absinthe, then shake out the excess.
Combine gin, Lillet Blanc, Cointreau, and lemon juice in a shaker with ice.
Shake well until chilled.
Strain into the prepared glass.
Garnish with a lemon twist or orange peel.

GRILLED SWORDFISH WITH LEMON CAPER SAUCE (COURTESY FOOD52)

4 tablespoon unsalted butter
1 large lemon, peeled, cut crosswise into 8 1/4" slices, seeded, with all the juice
2 tablespoon drained nonpareil capers
Sea salt and freshly ground white pepper to taste
3 swordfish steaks cut 1 1/4-inch thick (about 1 pound each)
3 tablespoon (very green) extra-virgin olive oil
2 teaspoon finely chopped parsley for garnish

Directions:

Melt 4 tablespoons butter in a small saucepan over medium low heat. Stir constantly until the butter is light brown, about 3 minutes.

Cut the lemon slices into quarters. Add them (with their juice), and the capers, to the saucepan. Reduce the heat and cook, shaking the pan several times, until the lemon and capers are heated through, about 1 minute. Light a grill or preheat the broiler. Brush the swordfish with olive oil on both sides. Sprinkle with salt and freshly ground white pepper to taste.

Grill or broil the swordfish about 4 inches from the heat, turning once, until charred outside and still slightly pink in the center (3 to 4 minutes per side).

Transfer the swordfish to a large platter and cut into thick strips. Pour the lemon and caper sauce over the fish and serve immediately, garnished with the chopped parsley.