



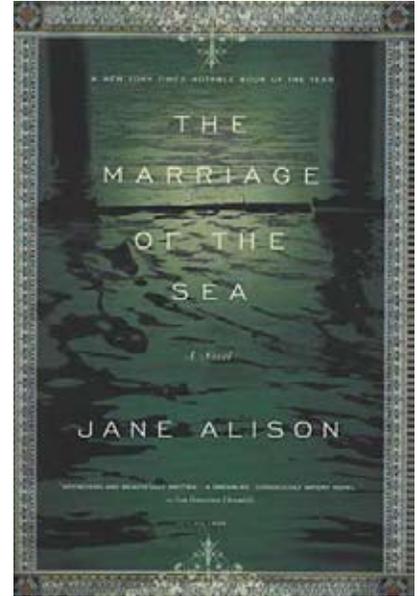
# Reading Group Gold

## Marriage of the Sea

by Jane Alison

### Introduction to *Marriage of the Sea*

*Marriage of the Sea*, the second novel by Jane Alison, acclaimed author of *The Love-Artist*, follows the emotionally resonant stories of three couples. Lach, self absorbed and sexually restless, has left long-term girlfriend Vera in New Orleans for the alluring new charms of Francesca in Venice; inconveniently, Vera soon relocates to the same Italian city after winning a Venetian foundation prize. Max, insecure and recently hurt by a former lover, has traveled to New Orleans from London, in pursuit of the pained, elusive Lucinde. And Anton, a struggling architect and devoted husband, must temporarily move to Venice for work while his troubled wife Josephine in Louisiana struggles with her inability to conceive a child. Skillfully interweaving these three narratives, Alison spins a captivating tale that is as hauntingly allusive as it is suspenseful. Set in the romantic locales of Venice and New Orleans, *Marriage of the Sea* is a poignant portrait of star-crossed lovers and, as Margo Livesey (*Eva Moves the Furniture*) wrote in *The New York Times*, “the evanescent, seductive, heartless world they are seeking with such ardent specificity to inhabit -- and sometimes to leave.”



ISBN: 978-0-312-42255-4 | 2004

### Praise for *Marriage of the Sea*

“Beautifully balanced...Wrenching and beautifully written...A dreamlike, gorgeously watery novel.”  
- *San Francisco Chronicle*

“Elegant, melancholy...absorbing.” - *Time Out New York*

“Intriguing...flows with stylistic brilliance.” - *The Baltimore Sun*

“Highly controlled lushness...in the manner of Michael Cunningham’s *The Hours*...Ambitious, complex, challengingly intellectual--and yet Alison manages it all with a clarity, learnedness, and rigor that brings into being a creation of real beauty...A real achievement.” - Kirkus Reviews (starred)

“[An] intricate, elegant second novel.” - The New York Times Book Review



# Reading Group Gold

## Reading Group Guide Questions

1. How does opening scene with Oswaldo set up the novel's main themes concerning time and place? How important is location and atmosphere to the story? Why? Which descriptive passages about location did you find the most affecting and evocative?
2. "If you want nothing," Oswaldo observes on page 134. "You do not want to live." Discuss the thematic connection between life and "wanting" as represented by the characters of Max, Lach, Anton, Lucinde and Josephine.
3. Would you describe *Marriage of the Sea* as a realistic novel? How does Alison use magical and fantastical elements throughout the story?
4. Which character in the novel did you have the most sympathy for? Which the least? Explain.
5. Do you see any connection between some of the characters professions and their personalities? Explain.
6. Did the course of the relationships in the novel turn out as you anticipated? Were you surprised by any of characters' decisions? Explain.
7. What past events haunt Lucinde, Anton and Max? How do those events respectively affect their present? Discuss Alison's allusive writing style in evoking these characters' histories.
8. Discuss the significance of the title *Marriage of the Sea*. How does water figure into the story, both literally and metaphorically?
9. On page 249, Oswaldo thinks, "All the busyness and vainglorious fuss that we make, all for nothing. A day will come when nothing is left and no one will see. Why bother?" What answer does the novel pose to this question?
10. What do you make of the story's ending? Were you overcome by a sense of despair or hope? Explain.
11. If you could write another chapter for each of the characters, what would you envision happening?

## About the Author

Jane Alison is the author of *The Love-Artist*. She lives in Germany.



# Reading Group Gold