Dancing Backwards

If you've never taken a cruise and are considering one, this novel paints this form of travel in a good light, especially if you are thinking of a transatlantic one. Recently-widowed Violet Hetherington impulsively decides to visit a dear male friend from her youth in New York City and treats herself to a good berth with a balcony. Not only does she describe the foibles and habits of the upper classes, but she also details everyday encounters with the ship's staff.

Sally Vickers expertly weaves two stories: Violet as a young woman just before her first marriage and the more mature woman who has been wounded by love. The novel is replete with ocean descriptions, dance lessons on board, and friendships made. Many events on the ship recall something from her past, for example, dancing in high heels reminds her of the night she tossed her shoes into traffic while having a fight with her first husband.

Edwin, the man she is going to visit, is gay. They were once roommates and fellow writers. He's the person who always encouraged Violet to try new things: writing poetry, editing a journal, etc. As in most novels set in the past, much regret is detailed. But this is a lovely book about a journey, a journey on the high seas as well as deep within. The author once worked as a psychoanalyst, and in addition to really fine writing, this novel is full of amazing psychological insights.

Another British woman writer who writes about similar themes is Penelope Fitzgerald .
Posted by Dory L. on July 31, 2011

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- Dancing backwards

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