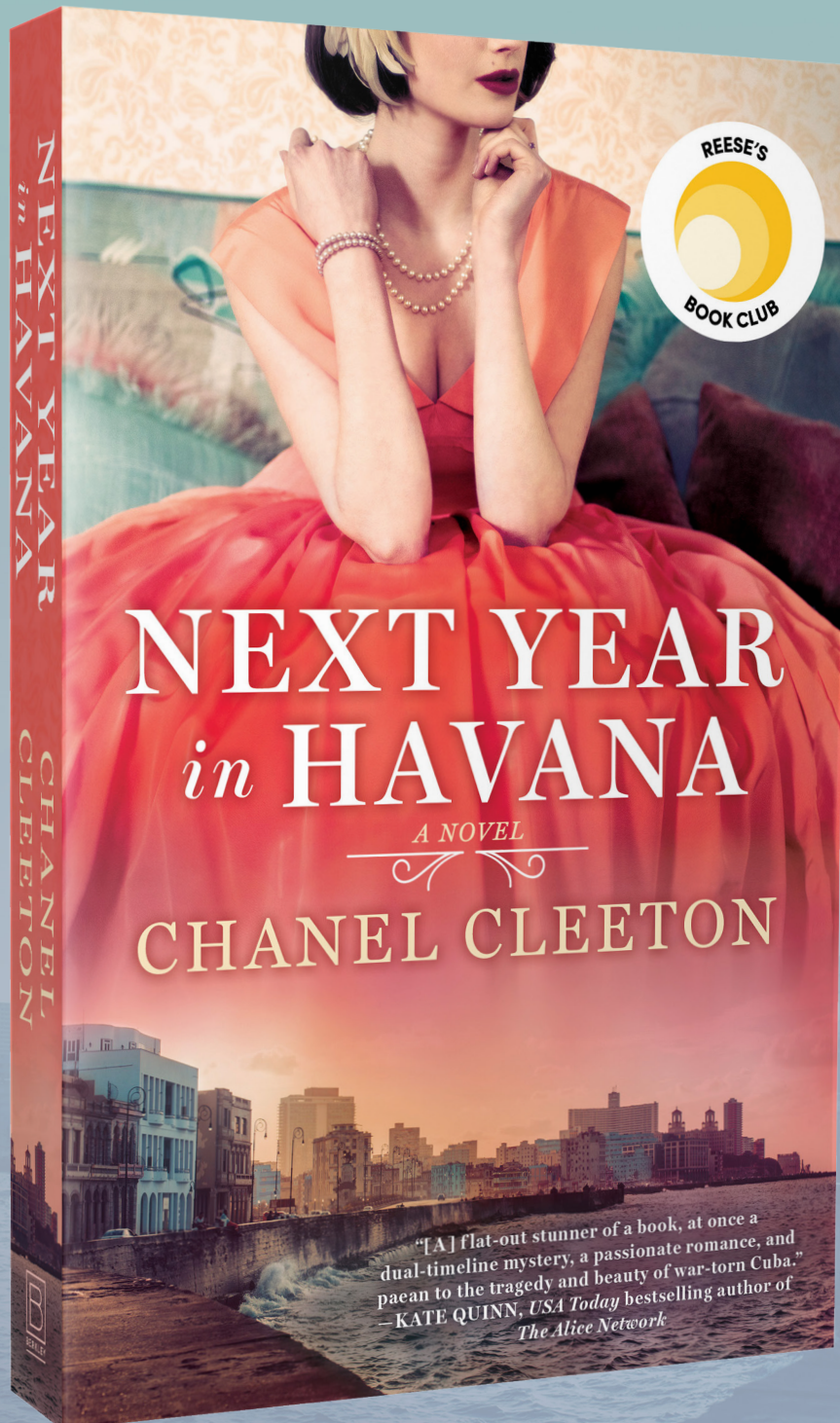

Book Club Kit



Penguin
Random
House

Dear Reader,

In October 1967, my father and grandparents left Cuba and came to the United States as refugees. They didn't know how long they would be gone, but after living under Fidel Castro's regime for over eight years, hunger, violence, and fear becoming part of their daily lives, staying in Havana was no longer an option.

Fifty years later, my family has settled in the United States. What my grandparents envisioned as a temporary exile has turned into a more permanent one—my grandmother passed away without being able to return to the island she mourned dearly and her ashes sit waiting for us to take her back to a free Cuba.

In exile, my grandparents created their own version of Cuba which became the backbone of our family traditions and legacy. Growing up, Cuba was a huge part of my daily life—the stories my family told, the language we spoke, the music we listened to, the food we ate, the hope that one day we would return instilled in me from an early age. I poured over the old photographs and documents that were smuggled out of the country after my family left by friends over the years, some sent over in old film canisters with the hope that the government wouldn't open them and risk damaging the film. These stories, these memories, this version of Cuba given to me by my family, nurtured in exile, became the foundation for

NEXT YEAR IN HAVANA.

Writing this novel gave me the opportunity to examine my heritage, honor the past, and cast hopeful eyes toward a brighter future for Cuba and its people. At times it felt as though the book brought my grandmother back to life as I became immersed in the version of Cuba she loved so faithfully. There was anger as I researched the struggles of modern Cuba, frustration with the current political climate, but more than anything, pride in being Cuban and sharing the legacy of courage, ingenuity, and most of all—hope.

So many of us are here as a result of the sacrifices of our ancestors, and I hope this book celebrates that courage as well as inspiring others to think about where they come from and how those roots have shaped them. Thank you for letting me share it with you.

Happy reading!

Chanel Cleeton



Behind the Book

On January 1, 1959, Cubans woke to the news that President Fulgencio Batista had fled the country after years of political violence and strife. They woke to riots in the streets, chaos in the country, some celebration, but also fear as they waited for the victors—Fidel Castro and his 26th of July Movement—to march toward Havana.

My grandmother was forty years old and pregnant with my father—a baby she referred to as her “miracle baby” given the circumstances surrounding his birth. I’ve always wondered what it must have been like for her to live in such tumultuous times, to feel powerless in the face of such turmoil. My grandparents spoke of Cuba often, but when it came to the revolution, they were often reticent, as though it was simply too horrible to relive.

In the years after Fidel took power, my family’s life irrevocably changed. My family went from a comfortable life to one filled with fear and uncertainty during events like the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis, the things they’d worked for taken from them by their government, food in short supply. After fifty years in the United States, my grandfather has never forgotten the years when food was scarce and he still is unable to let any food go to waste.

In October of 1967, my family fled Cuba and sought refuge in the United States. It wasn’t an easy exodus: my grandfather was sent away for a year for asking to leave Cuba, and when things seemed insurmountable, they considered sending my father alone as a part of the Peter Pan rescue flights where children were sent out of the country with the hope that they would be reunited with their family in the future.

When my family left Cuba, they couldn’t take valuables with them, couldn’t bring their passports, wedding rings, family photos. Instead, they hid those items in the walls of their home and buried them in their backyard, waiting for the day they could return. It’s hard to fathom how temporary it seemed at the time; no one imagined exile would be so permanent. The amount of hope that must have precipitated such an action, as well as the fear and uncertainty, gripped me, and as a writer, I couldn’t shake the question—

If you were forced to leave your home, and you had a box in which to place your most prized possessions, what would you choose to save for the day you would return?

Fifty years later, my family is still in the United States. My grandfather came here with his wife and son in tow as refugees, and with the help of friends and family, he was able to resume his medical practice. My family has built a life here, thrived in the country that welcomed us. And still, despite the changes, the subtle shift in policy, the death of Fidel Castro—we haven’t been able to return to Cuba. My grandmother died dreaming of her homeland, and her ashes sit in an urn, waiting for her final resting place.

Who knows what has become of the box my grandparents buried? Perhaps it was found by the families that moved in after they left, the valuables useful to those who lived under Fidel’s austerity. Perhaps they wondered about the lives of those who buried it, inventing stories about them much as I have of an island built on hope and dreams.

And maybe the box is still buried in the ground, waiting for us to return.



One Night in Havana

A Themed Book Club Night



Music

BUENA VISTA SOCIAL CLUB's self-titled album is the perfect backdrop for a Cuban themed book club night. The music tells the story of Cuba from some of our most talented musicians, and is ideal for setting the mood. It's a fabulous album that has gained international acclaim.



© World Circuit

Drinks

SANGRIA

Sangria is a favorite among Cubans. I love to make it when I'm entertaining!

- 1 ½ cup of orange juice
- ½ cup of lime juice
- 1 bottle of Merlot
- 8 oz. of rum
- 12 oz. of club soda
- ½ cup of sugar

Pour the red wine into a large pitcher filled with ice cubes. Add the orange juice, lime juice, rum, club soda, and sugar. Stir. Garnish with orange slices and lime slices. Serve cold and over ice, serves 10-12.



CUBA LIBRE

One of our most famous cocktails is a Cuba Libre—a mixture of rum and coke with a splash of lime. The Cuba Libre—which translates to “Free Cuba”—was reportedly created during Cuba’s struggle for independence from Spain during the 19th century. The term, “Cuba Libre” gained popularity during later years when it was used to rally the troops during the Spanish-American War. It’s now taken on a special meaning for exiles, especially when paired with Bacardi rum. The Bacardi family was prominent in Cuba and forced to leave the country after the events of the Cuban Revolution.

- 1 part BACARDÍ GOLD Rum
- 2 parts cola (bottled)
- 2 lime wedges

Fill a highball glass with ice. Then squeeze 2 lime wedges over the ice and drop them into the glass. Pour in the BACARDÍ GOLD, followed by chilled cola, and give it all a gentle stir. garnish with lime. (Recipe from Bacardi.com)



One Night in Havana

A Themed Book Club Night

Menu

Food is an important part of our culture and one of the things I miss most when I'm away from my family.

PICADILLO

Picadillo was one of my grandmother's favorite meals to make and one we ate as a family almost every week. It's a hearty meal that is the ultimate comfort food for me. Here's a recipe for the picadillo we used to eat at home.

1 1/2 lbs. of ground beef	16 oz. can of tomato paste
1 onion, diced	18 oz. can of tomato sauce
3 cloves of fresh garlic, minced	2 bay leaves
1 green bell pepper, chopped	1/4 cup of pimiento stuffed olives
1/2 teaspoon of salt	1/3 cup of raisins
1/2 teaspoon of pepper	1/3 cup of dry white cooking wine
1/2 teaspoon of ground cinnamon	2 tablespoons of olive oil
1/2 teaspoon of oregano	2 cups of cooked white rice

Pour 2 tablespoons of olive oil in a large skillet and heat over medium heat. Sauté the onion, garlic, and green bell pepper until tender. Add ground beef to the mixture and cook until brown. Once meat is brown, add tomato paste, sauce, and dry white cooking wine to the mix. Stir over medium heat. Add salt, pepper, ground cinnamon, oregano, bay leaves, olives, and raisins to the mixture. Cook on low for approximately 20 minutes until meat is cooked through. Serve over cooked white rice, serves 4.

MERENGUITOS

One of my fondest memories of my grandmother is of her making me merenguitos when I was a little girl. I would come home from school and see them in the cookie jar, and it was the best thing ever. She always made them as a surprise and they were amazing. To this day, whenever I have one, I think of her. Here's my grandmother's merenguito recipe.

4 egg whites
(eggs should be room temperature)

1 cup of sugar

1/4 tsp. cream of tartar sugar

Preheat oven to 200 degrees Fahrenheit. Place the egg whites in a medium-sized bowl. Add cream of tartar. Beat the egg whites and the cream of tartar on medium speed for approximately one minute. The mixture should appear frothy. Slowly add in the sugar while beating the mixture. After approximately five to ten minutes of beating, the mixture should become firm. Place parchment paper on a baking sheet and place the merengue into small circular mounds on the baking sheet using a tablespoon. Bake the merenguitos at 200 degrees Fahrenheit for approximately 2 hours.

Other Suggestions

Have book club members bring family photos of their ancestors and share a story about their family's history.

Play a game like dominoes, a traditional Cuban pastime.

Decorate with fun tropical decorations for your own *Tropicana* experience!



Discussion Questions

- 1 The novel alternates between Elisa Perez's life in Cuba in 1958 and 1959 and her granddaughter Marisol Ferrera's trip to Cuba in 2017. Which woman did you identify with more? What parallels can you see between their personalities and their lives? What differences?
- 2 The first chapter ends with Elisa wondering how long her family will be away from Cuba. The final chapter ends over a decade later with her posing the same question. How are the themes of hope and exile illustrated in the book? How does the weight of exile affect the Perez family?
- 3 When Marisol arrives in Cuba she struggles with identifying as Cuban because she grew up in the United States and because she has never set foot on Cuban soil. How much does a physical place define one's identity? How does Marisol's trip alter her views about being Cuban and change her perception of herself? How do Marisol and her family attempt to keep their heritage alive in exile? Are there stories and rituals handed down through the generations in your family?
- 4 Like her grandmother, Marisol falls in love with a man who has revolutionary political leanings. What similarities can you see between Pablo and Luis's dreams for Cuba? What differences are there in their worldview? How do they go about achieving their dreams for a better Cuba?
- 5 Sacrifice is a major theme that runs throughout the novel. How do the characters make sacrifices for one another, and what are some examples of them risking their safety and security for their loved ones? How do you think you would have acted in similar situations?
- 6 Family plays an important role in the novel, and each of the characters face their own struggles in their attempts to live up to their family's expectations. What are some examples of this? Did you identify with one character's point of view more? Are there certain expectations in your own family? Do you feel the need to live up to them? How have they shaped your life decisions?
- 7 Elisa's final wish is to have her ashes scattered over Cuban soil. Do you agree with her decision? Would you have wanted your ashes spread in Cuba or would you have preferred to be buried on American soil? Do you think Marisol picked the best place to spread Elisa's ashes? Where else would you have considered scattering them? Have you scattered the ashes of a loved one? What was the experience like?
- 8 What initially attracts Elisa to Pablo? Do you believe they would have been able to overcome the differences between them if they weren't caught in the midst of the Cuban Revolution? Or was their love fueled by the urgency of the times?
- 9 Elisa chooses to save her letters from Pablo and her memories of their romance by burying them in a box in the backyard. If you had a box in which to bury your most precious possessions, what would you choose to keep safe?
- 10 What parallels do you see between life in modern Cuba and life in pre-revolutionary Cuba? What differences?
- 11 Pablo tells Elisa that everything is political. Do you agree with him?
- 12 Despite coming from very different backgrounds, Marisol and Luis share many similarities that bring them together as a couple. What are some examples of this? Why do you think they get along so well? Do you think they are a good influence on each other?
- 13 Pablo believes that the best way to change his country is from within. Others like Elisa's family choose to leave Cuba because they can no longer support the regime. Which approach do you identify with? What are the differences between the Cubans who remained in Cuba and those who live in exile? What are the similarities?


About Chanel Cleeton



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Originally from Florida, Chanel Cleeton grew up on stories of her family's exodus from Cuba following the events of the Cuban Revolution. Her passion for politics and history continued during her years spent studying in England where she earned a bachelor's degree in International Relations from Richmond, The American International University in London and a master's degree in Global Politics from the London School of Economics & Political Science. Chanel also received her Juris Doctor from the University of South Carolina School of Law. She loves to travel and has lived in the Caribbean, Europe, and Asia.

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