

"Bold, unconventional Beatriz
makes a heroine for the ages....
A thrilling, thought-provoking read!"

—KATE QUINN



WHEN WE LEFT CUBA

A NOVEL

CHANEL CLEETON

USA Today Bestselling Author of *NEXT YEAR IN HAVANA*,
A REESE WITHERSPOON BOOK CLUB PICK

BOOK CLUB KIT



DEAR READER,

When I began writing *Next Year in Havana* and created the fictional Perez family, I strove to make their story unique from my family's, while also infusing the characters with some personal details. My grandmother had six siblings—five sisters and a brother—and I have fond memories of her hours-long (and to my father and grandfather's vexation—outrageously expensive) long-distance phone calls to her sisters. I gave my heroine Elisa Perez sisters—Isabel, Beatriz, and Maria—because I knew she would need them throughout her journey, and I imagined that much like my grandmother, she would draw strength from her family. At the time, *Next Year in Havana* was meant to be the only entry into the Perez sisters' lives. And then I met Beatriz.

From the first moment I introduced Beatriz, I had to tell her story. I actually stopped writing *Next Year in Havana* so I could write the first chapter of *When We Left Cuba*. Beatriz's voice was so strong in my head, likely because it was so familiar. While Beatriz was always her own unique character, her spirit was inspired by the strong, glamorous, bold Cuban women I saw around me—particularly my grandmother who was unafraid to voice her opinion, even when doing so was extremely dangerous, who was always unapologetically herself, whose loyalty and conviction stayed with her for her entire life.

When We Left Cuba hooked me from the beginning. My father and grandparents were still in Cuba during this critical era in Cuban-American relations, and it was fascinating and sobering to hear their perspective having lived through these events on the other side of the sea. The more I researched this period in history and learned about the fervent, and at times, outlandish attempts the CIA made on Fidel Castro's life (from poisonous lipstick worn by a mistress to explosive seashells and cigars), I was unable to resist the opportunity to involve Beatriz in this dramatic time. Her exploits, her courage, and her passion led me on a grand adventure throughout *When We Left Cuba* and cemented her place as my personal favorite of the Perez sisters.

Since I first introduced Elisa and her siblings in *Next Year in Havana*, I've been honored to share their story with so many readers who have embraced the characters, and in turn, written me beautiful notes sharing their own family history with me. As my grandparents' generation grows older and passes on, I yearn to preserve the stories, memories, and culture they gave to me. Speaking with readers and hearing their thoughts on these books and how the characters have mirrored some of their own experiences has been such a privilege, and truly helped me to feel even more connected to this part of my identity. Thank you all for reading *When We Left Cuba* and embarking on this new chapter in the Perez family's life. I am so grateful to be able to share it with all of you.

HAPPY READING!

Chanel Cleeton

RECIPES

MOJITO

The mojito is another one of our famous cocktails, and reportedly the best place to go for mojitos is La Bodeguita del Medio in Havana. It was also one of Ernest Hemingway's favorite bars. If you want to make your own mojito, here is a great recipe from Bacardi.

4 lime wedges
2 tsp. extra fine sugar
12 fresh mint leaves
2 parts Bacardí Superior rum
Sprig of fresh mint
2 part soda water/club soda

Take the lime wedges and squeeze them in the glass. Gently press together the limes and sugar.

Bruise the mint leaves by clapping them between your palms, then rub them on the rim of the glass and drop them in.

Next, half fill the glass with crushed ice, add the Bacardí Superior rum and stir.

Top with crushed ice, a sprig of mint, and club soda.

DAIQUIRI

If you love daiquiris, you'll want to try one of the famous ones from El Floridita bar in Havana, another of Ernest Hemingway's favorite haunts. Here's the recipe from El Floridita.

2 ounces white rum
 $\frac{3}{4}$ ounce fresh lime juice
1 tsp. sugar or simple syrup
(or less, to taste)
1 teaspoon maraschino liqueur

Combine ingredients in a cocktail shaker (if using granulated sugar, stir to dissolve it in the lime juice before adding the other ingredients) and fill with ice.

Shake well, and strain into a chilled cocktail glass.

Garnish with a thin slice of lime.

SEAFOOD PAELLA

A lot of Cuban food is very similar to Spanish food, and paella is one of those dishes that has a Spanish influence. It's also one of my absolute favorites. If you're in a time crunch, Vigo makes an excellent boxed paella to which you can add additional meat and seafood. If you want to make your paella from scratch, this is a family favorite.

1 lb. chicken	2 bay leaves
3 tablespoons of olive oil	1 tsp. salt
5 cloves garlic, minced	$\frac{1}{2}$ lb. ham
1 onion	3 cups of Valencia rice
1 cup chorizo sausage, sliced	1 lb. steamed oysters or clams
4 cups chicken broth	1 lb. scallops
1 cup red wine	1 lb. shrimp
$\frac{1}{4}$ cup of peas, cooked	

Cook chicken in skillet with olive oil. Set aside when finished. Heat olive oil in paella pan or large covered pot. Sauté onion and garlic over medium heat until onions are soft. Then add in the chorizo to sauté. Chicken broth and red wine are added next. Put the cooked chicken into the mixture, as well as cooked peas, bay leaves, salt, and ham. Add in the rice. Bring to a boil, and then reduce the heat to low, and cover and cook on low for approximately 45 minutes or until rice is cooked. While the rice is cooking, cook the seafood in a separate pan with olive oil. When the rice is finished, gently fold the seafood into the rice mixture. Put the pan into the oven (preheated to 350 degrees Fahrenheit) and cook for 5 minutes.

RECIPES

CALDO DE POLLO (Chicken Soup)

If you're sick, Cuban chicken soup is the best. It's also perfect during the winter. Here's my favorite family recipe for chicken soup.

Adobo and cumin	2 tablespoons of olive oil
8 chicken thighs	3 chicken bouillon cubes
1/2 bunch of green onions, chopped	1 white potato, unpeeled and cut into cubes
4 garlic cloves	1 package of egg noodles
1 green pepper	1 lime
1 onion	Black pepper to taste
1/2 bunch of cilantro, chopped	

Season the chicken thighs with Adobo and cumin. Cook them in a pot with water covering the chicken. Bring to a boil and then reduce heat, cover, and simmer on low for about 25 minutes until the chicken is cooked. In a separate pot, sauté the green onions, garlic, green pepper, onion, and cilantro with the olive oil. Once these are softened, add in 8 cups of water, the bouillon cubes, and potato. Stir. Shred the chicken thighs and add to the soup mixture. Simmer on low for approximately 45 minutes. Add in egg noodles and bring to a boil. Cook for another 5 minutes. Season with fresh limes (squeeze for juice) and black pepper.

FLAN

6 eggs
1 tsp. vanilla
1 12 oz. can of evaporated milk
1 14 oz. can of sweetened condensed milk
4 oz. cream cheese, cut up
1 cup sugar
Water

Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit.

Mix eggs, vanilla, evaporated milk, condensed milk, and cream cheese in a blender. Set aside.

Heat sugar on high (add a few drops of water to help liquefy) in saucepan until caramel-colored and liquefied. Remove from heat and immediately pour into a round or square mold/pan and rotate so caramelized sugar covers all of the bottom of the pan. Pour flan mixture from blender on top of caramel.

Place in water bath and bake for 60-75 minutes.

Let the flan cool for approximately one hour minimum. To serve, carefully invert the flan onto serving plate when cool.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE REVOLUTION

ADDITIONAL READING:

WAITING FOR SNOW IN HAVANA
by Carlos Eire

HAVANA NOCTURNE
by T. J. English

DREAMING IN CUBAN
by Cristina García

THE BAY OF PIGS
by Howard Jones

THIRTEEN DAYS: A MEMOIR OF
THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS
by Robert F. Kennedy

BACK CHANNEL TO CUBA
by William M. LeoGrande and
Peter Kornbluh

THE BRILLIANT DISASTER
by Jim Rasenberger

THE STORY OF MARITA LORENZ
(Vanity Fair)

FIDEL CASTRO: THE CIA'S
7 MOST BIZARRE
ASSASSINATION ATTEMPTS
(NBC News)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In the first chapter, Beatriz says that she is somewhere between the girl she was and the woman she wants to be. How do you see her character grow and change throughout the novel?
2. When Beatriz arrives in Palm Beach, she feels out of place in society and cut off from the familiar people and things she loves. Can you relate to her experience of being a fish out of water? Have you ever experienced something similar, and how did it affect you?
3. Beatriz is motivated by her desire to avenge her brother's death as well as her love of her country. Which of these motivations is stronger for her, or do you believe they are intertwined? Do you agree with her actions or not?
4. When Beatriz becomes involved with the CIA, she acknowledges that war makes for strange bedfellows as she is now aligned with an organization she once decried. Do you agree with her decision? Do you believe in the axiom, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend," or do you disagree?
5. Beatriz and Eduardo have a close relationship, and the possibility of a romance between them simmers in the background of the novel. If things had worked out differently, do you think they could have had a future together? Do you think the bond between them is bolstered by their common interests, or is it mainly a product of nostalgia for the life they lived in Cuba? What similarities do you see between their personalities? What differences?
6. Throughout the book, Beatriz struggles to understand Eduardo's motives. Do you think he acts out of self-interest or patriotism? Do you think he has Beatriz's best interests at heart, or do you think he uses her for his own ends?
7. Which Perez sister do you identify with: Beatriz, Elisa, Isabel, or Maria? What traits do the sisters share, and in what ways are they different?
8. Both Beatriz and Nick are shaped by war. He's influenced by his experiences serving in World War II, Beatriz by the Cuban Revolution. How has war shaped them? Has it influenced them in different or similar ways?
9. Beatriz chafes at the constraints placed on her by her family and their desire that she find a suitable husband. Can you relate with her desire to please her family while still following her heart? How much of the limitations placed on her are a product of the times and her background?
10. Beatriz and Nick are defined by their loyalties to their respective countries. How do you think this affects their relationship? Do you think timing plays the biggest role in their relationship, or are there other factors that keep them apart? What if they had met in Havana? Or before he was engaged?
11. Each member of Beatriz's family takes a somewhat distinct approach to exile. Elisa builds a new life for herself in the United States; Isabel leaves her fiancé behind in Cuba; Maria adjusts to life in the United States with ease; their parents become obsessed with shoring up their financial and social influence to protect themselves from future ruin. How do you think Beatriz's feelings about exile differ from those of her family? How is the theme of exile explored in the book?
12. Mr. Dwyer plays a formative role in Beatriz's life and almost represents a paternal figure for her. How does their relationship change as the book progresses? Do you think he truly cares for Beatriz or only cares for her utility to the CIA? Is he motivated by self-interest or a sense of patriotic duty?
13. The CIA's role in Latin America and their efforts in Cuba heavily influenced the events of the early 1960s. What do you think about their motives and policies? Do you agree with their involvement in Cuba's affairs?
14. Beatriz's life is defined by the time period she grows up in and the events she experiences: the Cuban Revolution, Bay of Pigs, Cuban Missile Crisis, and Kennedy Assassination, to name a few. What world events have played defining roles in your life? What memories do you have of them? How have they influenced you?

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ABOUT CHANEL CLEETON

Chanel Cleeton is the *USA Today* bestselling author of the Reese Witherspoon Book Club pick *Next Year in Havana*. She received 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 and 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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