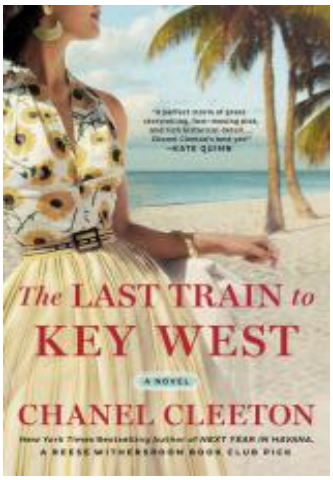
The Last Train to Key West

by Chanel Cleeton



About the Book

In 1935, three women are forever changed when one of the most powerful hurricanes in history barrels toward the Florida Keys.

For the tourists traveling on Henry Flagler?s legendary Overseas Railroad, Labor Day weekend is an opportunity to forget the economic depression gripping the nation. But one person?s paradise can be another?s prison, and Key West native Helen Berner yearns to escape.

After the Cuban Revolution of 1933 leaves Mirta Perez?s family in a precarious position, she agrees to an arranged marriage with a notorious American. Following her wedding in Havana, Mirta arrives in the Keys on her honeymoon. While she can?t deny the growing attraction to her new husband, his illicit business interests may threaten not only her relationship, but her life.

Elizabeth Preston's trip to Key West is a chance to save her once-wealthy family from their troubles after the Wall Street crash. Her quest takes her to the camps occupied by veterans of the Great War and pairs her with an unlikely ally on a treacherous hunt of his own.

Over the course of the holiday weekend, the women?s paths cross unexpectedly, and the danger swirling around them is matched only by the terrifying force of the deadly storm threatening the Keys.

Discussion Guide

1. At the beginning of the novel, Helen says, ?People are what circumstances make them.? Do you agree with her statement? Why or why not? Are there places in the book where this sentiment seems to be true? How do the characters demonstrate this?

2. The hurricane hits Key West in 1935, during the Great Depression. What effect does the Depression have on the characters, on the setting? How do larger world events shape characters? lives in the book?

3. What parallels do you see between the effects the hurricane has on the characters and that of fighting in the Great War?

4. How is the treatment of the veterans of the Great War similar to the problems faced by society during the Great Depression? Were you surprised to hear about the veterans? lives after they came home from the war and some of the challenges they faced?

5. Helen and John have both experienced trauma. How does it shape them? What similarities do you see between their experiences and the way they cope with them? What differences?

6. Mirta and Elizabeth both come from wealthy families that have fallen on hard times. What similarities do you see in their personalities? What differences? How do those similarities and differences influence the choices they make throughout the novel?

7. THE LAST TRAIN TO KEY WEST alternates between Helen?s, Mirta?s and Elizabeth?s perspectives. Which character did you identify with most? How do they grow and change throughout the novel?

8. Elizabeth tells Sam that the Depression has been particularly hard on women. What examples do you see throughout the book where women?s lives are influenced by society?s expectations for them? How do they react to these expectations?

9. During the Depression, marriage rates dropped significantly. At the same time, marriage plays an important role in the characters? lives. How do the heroines? views on marriage change throughout the novel? Do the women find power in their relationships?

10. Mirta and Anthony?s marriage changes throughout the novel. What shifts do you see in their relationship? What roles do they take on, and how do they evolve in those roles?

11. All of the main characters are searching for something at the start of the novel. Do they ultimately find what they were looking for? How does the journey change them? What were they really searching for to begin with?

12. The characters? lives are largely shaped by the hurricane and its aftermath. Have you ever experienced a natural disaster? How did the experience influence you?

Author Bio

Chanel Cleeton is the *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author of AN INFINITE LOVE STORY, THE LOST STORY OF EVA FUENTES, THE HOUSE ON BISCAYNE BAY, THE CUBAN HEIRESS, OUR LAST DAYS IN BARCELONA, THE MOST BEAUTIFUL GIRL IN CUBA, THE LAST TRAIN TO KEY WEST, WHEN WE LEFT CUBA and Reese?s 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 & 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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