







*Dear Reader,*

I've always loved mysteries. I would pore over Nancy Drew novels as a child, trying to solve the puzzle alongside her intrepid group of friends, marveling at the adventures they embarked on. That same love of mysteries returns each time I sit down at my keyboard, shifting scenes and characters to create a story in my mind, trying to solve the eternal question: What happens next?

Writing historical fiction often feels like playing detective, venturing into the unknown past and piecing together the historical record to solve the mystery, the clues often scant, the stakes life or death. In the echoes of the past, I often find comfort in the present and inspiration for the future. And of course, there is always a mystery to be solved in trying to understand the impact the past had on the people who lived through these extraordinary events.

The subject of my novel *The Cuban Heiress* hooked me from the start. The setting of a luxury 1930s cruise ship embarking on a round-trip journey from New York to Havana, surrounded by the specter of the recent end of Prohibition, the ongoing Great Depression, and the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution of 1933, provides the backdrop for the ultimate adventure. As I delved deeper into the history of the *SS Morro Castle* and the tragic—and mysterious—fire on its last voyage, I was fascinated by the question of what happened that fateful night in September. With so much speculation, rumor, and intrigue surrounding the ship, its crew, and its passengers, I began to envision the characters whose lives would be forever altered by their journey at sea. My two fictional heroines, Catherine Dohan and Elena Palacio, were born.

On a ship mired in secrets and danger, it seemed only natural that Catherine and Elena would each be on a perilous quest of their own. And here, I was able to indulge my love of mystery a step further at each twist and turn in the novel, as the threats facing Catherine and Elena provided their own mysteries to be solved.

As a reader, my favorite book club picks are the ones that keep me up late into the night, that whisk me away on an adventure, the ones that I can't wait to talk about with my friends when I've finished. If your book club loves page-turning, immersive reads, then I hope you enjoy *The Cuban Heiress* as you join Catherine and Elena on their unforgettable journey.

Thank you for reading!

Best,

*Chanel Cleeton*





# TIMELINE FOR THE CUBAN HEIRESS

**JANUARY 1929**

Construction begins on the  
*SS Morro Castle* in Newport News, VA

**OCTOBER 1929-1939**

The Great Depression

**AUGUST 23, 1930**

*SS Morro Castle's*  
maiden voyage

**SEPTEMBER 1933**

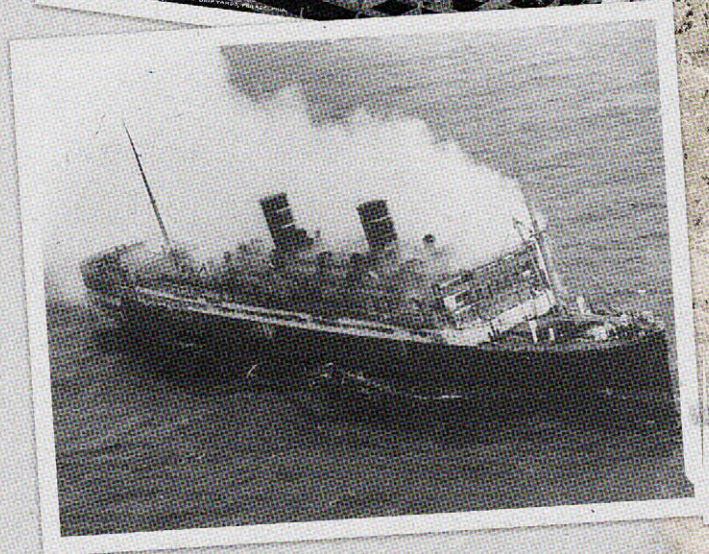
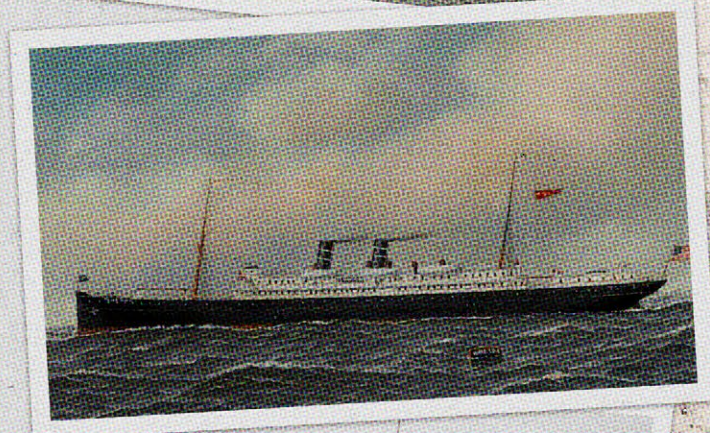
The Cuban Revolution, known  
as the "Sergeants' Revolt,"  
breaks out

**DECEMBER 5, 1933**

The Twenty-first Amendment to  
the U.S. Constitution is ratified,  
repealing Prohibition

**SEPTEMBER 8, 1934**

*SS Morro Castle* catches fire



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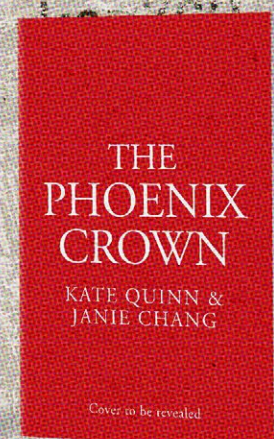
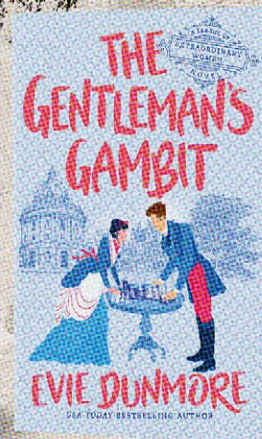
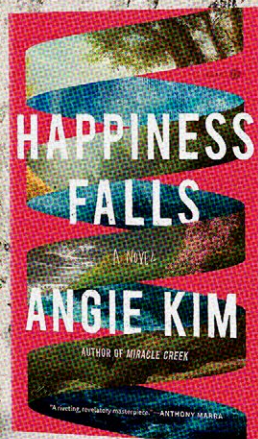
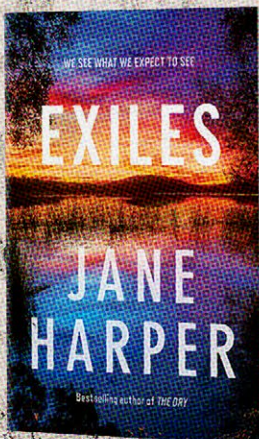
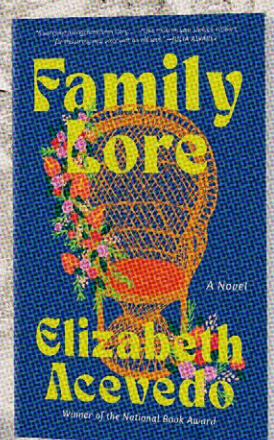
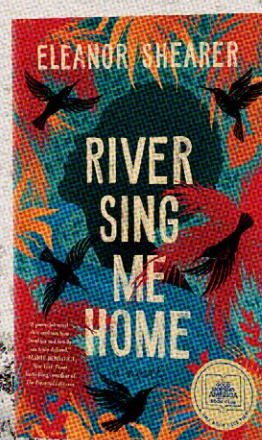
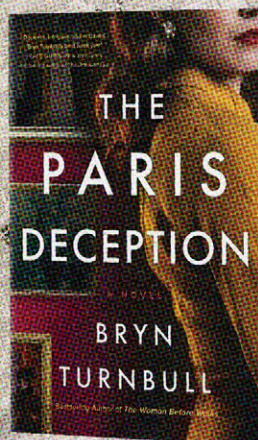
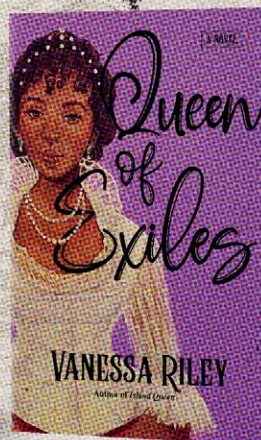
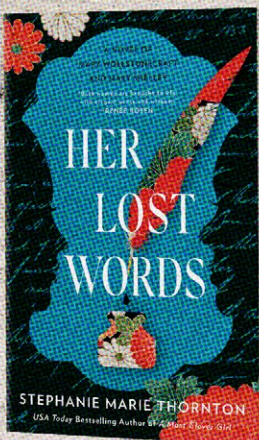
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# Chanel's MUST-READ BOOKS OF 2023

Here's a list of some 2023 releases that I read and loved, and some that I can't wait to read!





# Discussion Questions

1. Which heroine did you identify with more—Elena or Catherine? What characteristics in their personalities did you find similarities with? What characteristics did you find differences with?
2. Many of the characters throughout the novel make sacrifices on behalf of others. What examples did you find? Did you agree with the characters' actions in these situations? How would you have handled these decisions?
3. In this story, the *Morro Castle* sets sail in 1934, during the Great Depression and a year after the Cuban Revolution of 1933. How do these two events affect the characters, the setting, and the story?
4. Both Catherine and Harry board the *Morro Castle* with their own agendas and as outsiders on the ship. How do they relate to each other? How does this bring them closer throughout the cruise?
5. Catherine and Harry are both faced with difficult decisions in their lives where they are confronted with an opportunity to avenge people who were wronged by another. Do you see similarities in their situations? Do you agree with how they handled these decisions? Why or why not?
6. What role does motherhood play in the choices Elena makes throughout the novel? What sacrifices does she make for her daughter? How does her love for Ava motivate her?
7. Throughout the cruise, a friendship develops between Elena and Julio. What experiences bring them together? What do they have in common? Do you think their friendship will blossom into something more?
8. Elena and Catherine are both heavily influenced by the trauma they have experienced—first the fire in New York City, and then the fire onboard the *Morro Castle*. How do they both handle what they've experienced? How does it define them? How do they use it to further their aims?
9. Have you ever traveled on a cruise ship? What was your experience like?
10. Prior to reading *The Cuban Heiress*, were you familiar with the *Morro Castle*? Were you surprised by what you learned about the ship? What do you think caused the fire onboard?
11. At the time, the *Morro Castle* fire drew a great deal of attention and had a huge impact on those who survived the fire, as well as on the rest of the world. How do you think the fire shaped the characters' lives? What similar world events have influenced your life? What memories do you have of them?

