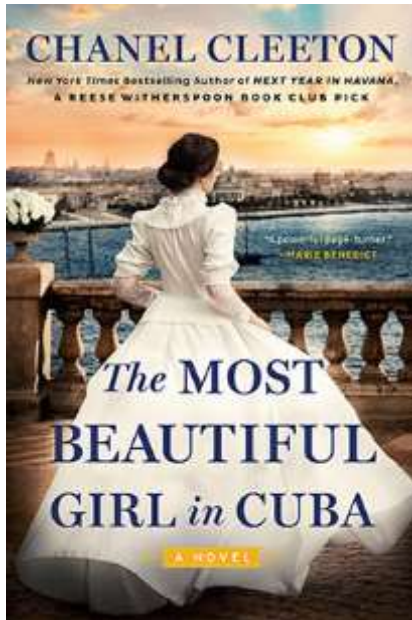


Hella's Book Review



Author Chanel Cleeton has written yet another amazing historical fiction about Cuba's tumultuous past. Her latest novel, *The Most Beautiful Girl in Cuba*, is set at the eve of the Spanish-American War, which took place from 1896 to 1898. At a time when the country was still in a bitter conflict between the Cuban revolutionaries and the Spanish military.

The story is told through the eyes of three very brave women, all who come from wealthy families but choose to seek more than what their rich lives would provide for them. *Evangelina Ciserno* is the title character, a true-life individual whom the story is based on. *Grace Harrington* who is aiming for a serious career as a journalist during a time when very few women were accepted as news reporters, and *Marina Perez*, the daughter of a rich sugar plantation family who sided with Spain. Marina's family disowned her when she married Mateo, a farmer fighting with the Revolutionaries for Cuban freedom.

In 1896 a feud rages between two giant newspaper tycoons, William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer. They both are involved in "yellow journalism" in which stories are often sensationalized and sometimes even false. Grace lends a job as a reporter at William Hearst New York Journal. She strives to do solid news reporting to make it in this cutthroat world where a story can make or break your career. When a story about Evangelina from Cuba emerges, Grace jumps on the opportunity.

18-year-old Evangelina, together with her sister Carmen and her father, who is a revolutionary, are exiled on the Isle of Pines. One-night Evangelina is attacked by a Spanish colonel. She accuses her attacker but she is the one arrested and sent to a horrific prison for women called Casa de Recogidas. She is very strong willed and refuses to retract her accusation, even if it means being released.

When Hearst learns of Evangelina's plight he sends reporters to Cuba to free her and splashes her picture on the front page of his newspaper proclaiming her "The Most Beautiful Girl in Cuba". She is rescued and brought to New York where she becomes an advocate for America's involvement to help Cuba gain independence from Spain.

While conditions in Cuba worsen, Marian, her little daughter Isabelle, and her mother in-law Luz, are forced to leave the farm and move into Havana into a reconcentration camp, while her husband is fighting with the revolutionary army. Marina tries to make ends meet by doing laundry for the rich in Havana, while becoming a courier for the Revolutionaries. She also delivers laundry to the prison where Evangeline is held, and is instrumental in helping her escape and get her onto a ship to New York.

The Most Beautiful Girl in Cuba by Chanel Cleeton is a well-researched historical fiction encompassing a story of courage, love, pain and suffering of three remarkable women. Will there be a happy ending for all three of them? To find out you'll have to visit the Tilden Public Library and check out this well written story. You will not be disappointed.

Happy Reading!