

BOOK CLUB KIT



BERKLEY

DEAR READER,

The Lost Story of Eva Fuentes is my love letter to the power of books and the impact they leave on our lives. It's a celebration of the booksellers, librarians, and readers whose passion for books inspires so many. It's also a thank-you to the many books and authors who've changed my life.

In *The Lost Story of Eva Fuentes*, my titular heroine, Eva Fuentes, is a Cuban teacher who travels to Harvard to study at the Cuban Summer School, a real-life exchange between Cuban and American educators at the beginning of the twentieth century. As a Cuban-American author, I love researching these moments in history, and it was so special to revisit this time period surrounding the Spanish-American War and Cuba's fight for independence. I researched while writing one of my earlier books, *The Most Beautiful Girl in Cuba*. I was also drawn to the subject because, like Eva, I moved abroad to study at a young age, and I found that experience to be one of the most formative of my life.

Eva is a writer, and the fictional book that she subsequently pens becomes the thread in the novel that connects three women spread across a century and several countries.

As I envisioned Eva's story, I considered who might need her novel, and the moment in which they might need it most. In revisiting the stories I'd heard growing up about life in post-revolutionary Cuba in the 1960s and the challenges so many faced, my heroine Pilar Castillo—a librarian—came to me immediately. In both her personal and professional life, she finds comfort, as so many do, in the power of literature to move and inspire.

Margo Reynolds is hired to find Pilar's mysterious novel in 2024, and in Margo's storyline, I was inspired by the years I spent living and studying in London. One of the courses I took during my studies touched on issues of art theft, seizure, and questions of provenance, and given my Cuban ancestry, I wanted to explore the topic further through the lens of the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution.

In the nine historical fiction novels I've written to date, I've travelled back in time with my characters, learning more about my heritage and these important moments in Cuban-American history. Thank you so much for coming along on this journey with me and for all that you do to champion books and their authors.

Chanel Cleeton

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The novel alternates between three heroines in three different time periods—Eva in 1900, Pilar in 1966, and Margo in 2024. Which heroine did you identify with most?
2. All three heroines are trying to find their place in society and their purpose in the times in which they live. How do they find their voices? What empowers them? What challenges do they face?
3. Both Eva and Pilar have experienced trauma in the political events they have lived through. How do they process that trauma? What similarities do you see in their circumstances? What differences? What has given you solace during the difficult times in your own life?
4. The titular character Eva Fuentes embarks on adventure when she participates in the largest Cuban-American cultural exchange as she travels to Harvard to attend a summer school for Cuban teachers. Have you ever been part of a similar exchange or study abroad? What was it like? What takeaways did you draw from the experience?
5. While they love each other very much, Margo and Luke struggle with juggling the demands of their careers and the different paths they envision for their marriage as well as the impact their family of origin has on them. Did you identify with some of the challenges they faced? Do you think they'll be able to overcome them? How does their relationship evolve throughout the novel?
6. Margo's job involves sourcing rare antiques and special items for her clients, and she feels like in her own way she is a custodian of their histories. Are there special family mementos that have been passed down in your own family, or have you found your own items with unique histories?

7. *The Lost Story of Eva Fuentes* centers around a novel that changes the lives of the three main characters in different ways. Is there a special book that has changed your life?
8. Pilar safeguards books for Cubans leaving the country in exile. The books that she's tasked with hiding often have some special meaning for their owner. If you faced a situation where you could only save one book, which one would you choose to save and why?
9. All three heroines have jobs that allow them to interact with books in different ways. If you had to choose a job in the book world, which one would you choose? Why?
10. Pilar believes that if someone doesn't love to read it's because they haven't found the right book for them yet. Have you been a lifelong reader or was there a specific book or event that ignited your love of reading?
11. Pilar talks about some of her favorite authors. Who are your favorite authors? What do you love about their books?