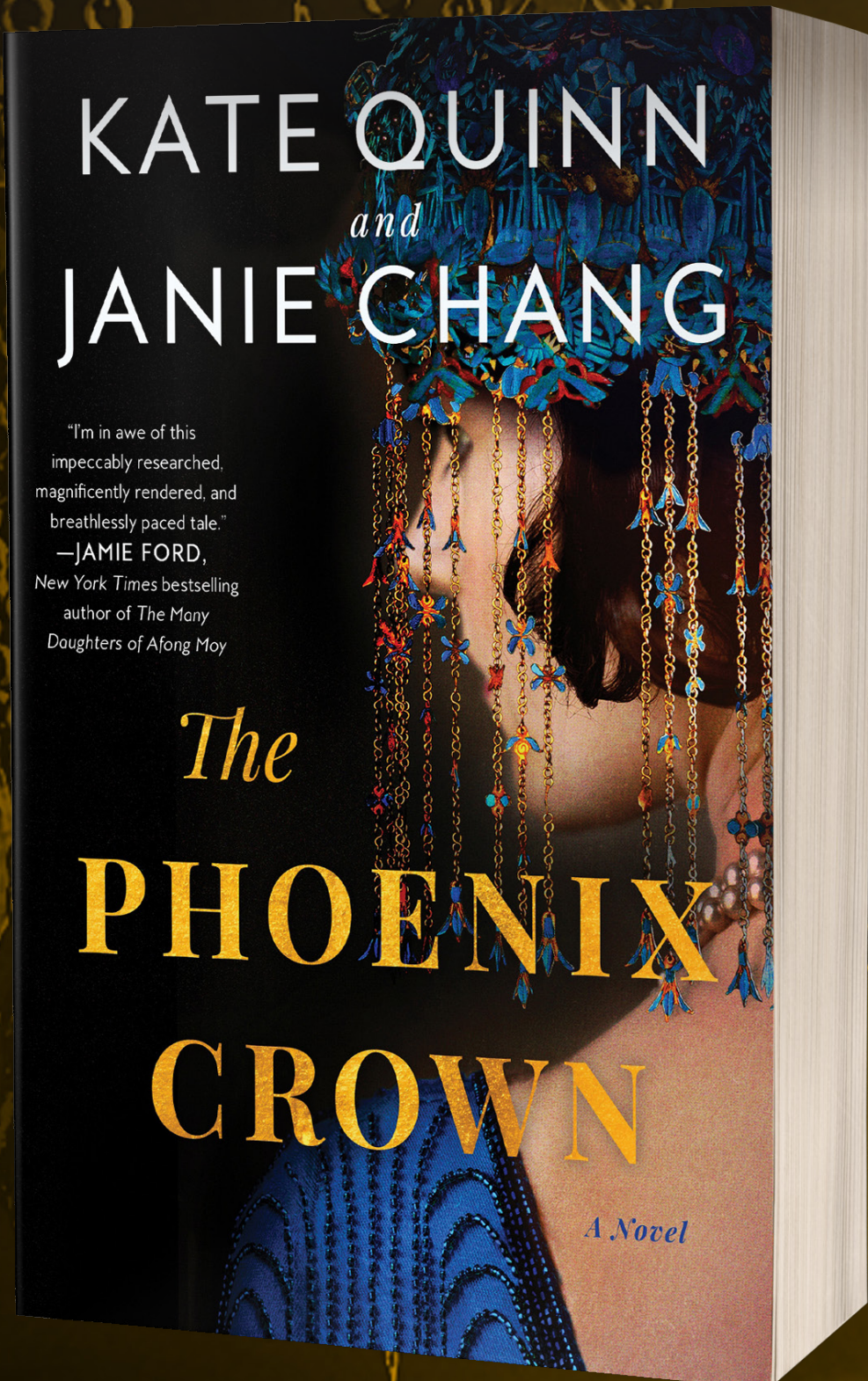
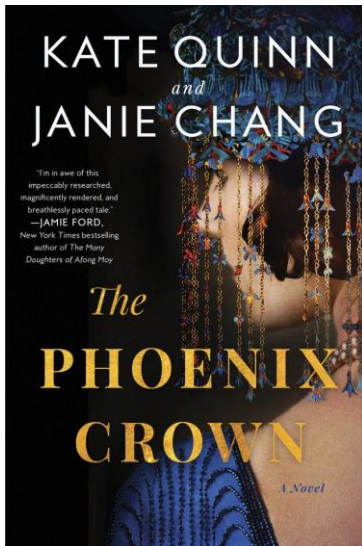


# READING GROUP GUIDE







## The Phoenix Crown

William Morrow

By Kate Quinn and Janie Chang

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### Introduction

**From bestselling authors Janie Chang and Kate Quinn, a thrilling and unforgettable narrative about the intertwined lives of two wronged women, spanning from the chaos of the San Francisco earthquake to the glittering palaces of Versailles.**

San Francisco, 1906. In a city bustling with newly minted millionaires and scheming upstarts, two very different women hope to change their fortunes: Gemma, a golden-haired, silver-voiced soprano whose career desperately needs rekindling, and Suling, a petite and resolute Chinatown embroideress who is determined to escape an arranged marriage. Their paths cross when they are drawn into the orbit of Henry Thornton, a charming railroad magnate whose extraordinary collection of Chinese antiques includes the fabled Phoenix Crown, a legendary relic of Beijing's fallen Summer Palace.

His patronage offers Gemma and Suling the chance of a lifetime, but their lives are thrown into turmoil when a devastating earthquake rips San Francisco apart and Thornton disappears, leaving behind a mystery reaching further than anyone could have imagined . . . until the Phoenix Crown reappears five years later at a sumptuous Paris costume ball, drawing Gemma and Suling together in one last desperate quest for justice.

## Questions for Discussion

1. The 1906 San Francisco Earthquake is one of the deadliest disasters in American history. How much did you know about it, going into the book? Have you read any other novels or non-fiction about the San Francisco earthquake?
  2. Gemma Garland is determined to build a career while handicapped by health issues and bad luck, and resolves to be hard-nosed in protecting her own interests. What did she learn in the course of events? Did your opinion of her change?
  3. Suling belonged to the first generation of American-born Chinese; in many ways people like her faced more challenges of identity than their parents did. Discuss those challenges and compare them to what immigrants today face when settling into a new country.
  4. What hints did you get that Suling was not typical of a Chinese girl of that era, and what influences in her life made those characteristics credible to you?
  5. Alice Eastwood is a friend and mentor to all the other women at various points in the novel—an independent woman with a career and a strong sense of self. What do the others learn from Alice, and what does she learn from them?
  6. Did you suspect the connection between Gemma's friend Nelly and Suling's suitor Reggie?
  7. Historical fiction frequently sparks an interest in learning more from the historical record. What storylines, tidbits, or trivia from this novel inspire you to go down the research rabbit hole?
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## Host Your Own Book Club Party

From the restaurants of Chinatown to the cafes of Paris, there's plenty in THE PHOENIX CROWN to tempt the appetites of your book club. Start with Chinese classics like Suling's shrimp with peas, finish with French favorites like Gemma's Tarte au Citron, and mix up a big bowl of San Francisco's famous Pisco Punch!

### SULING'S SHRIMP WITH PEAS

This is a recipe from Janie's mom, who made it Shanghai-style with a bit of sugar for a salty-sweet flavour. And as her mom liked to remind everyone: always use fresh ginger when cooking seafood. The shrimp and peas take no time at all to cook, so the key is to get everything prepped and ready to add to the pan!

- 1 lb medium size shrimp, peeled, deveined, tails removed (thawed from frozen is OK)
- 1 cup peas (thawed from frozen is OK)
- 2 tsp salt plus another 1/4 tsp
- 2 tsp cornstarch
- 1 tbsp minced fresh ginger
- Egg white from 1 large egg
- 3 tsp cooking sherry or Shaoxing wine if you can get it
- 2 tbsp light soy sauce
- 2 tbsp chicken broth
- 1 tsp sugar
- 2 tbsp oil (peanut, canola, or sunflower, but not olive)
- 1/4 tsp ground white pepper (optional)
- a few drops sesame oil (optional)

**Prep the shrimp:** put shrimp in a bowl, add 2 tsp of salt and mix gently. Cover with water and slosh around. Drain off the water, pat the shrimp dry with paper towels and put the shrimp in a clean bowl. In a small bowl, beat up the egg white, cornstarch, and 2 tsp of cooking wine then pour over the shrimp and mix gently. Set aside.

**Prep the sauce:** In a small bowl, whisk the chicken broth, sugar, and soy sauce

**Get cooking:** heat a large pan or wok on high until ready. (Test the pan by flicking water at the surface, and if the beads of water dance around before evaporating, it's ready). Add the oil and 1/4 tsp of salt. Swirl the oil around to coat the pan then add the shrimp and ginger. Cook for just 1 minute until the shrimp begins turning pink, then pour in the sauce. When the sauce comes to a boil, stir to coat the shrimp. Then add the peas, the remaining 1 tsp of cooking wine, and white pepper and stir fry for another 15 seconds to let the alcohol evaporate. Avoid overcooking, you want the peas to stay bright green. Remove from heat, add sesame oil if using, and serve immediately.

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### **GEMMA'S TARTE AU CITRON**

A French classic just right for any celebration between friends!

1. Mix up a batch of your favorite short-crust pastry dough, or take a short-cut with pre-made pie dough from the store (we won't tell!) Roll out chilled dough and drape carefully over a greased 9-inch tart pan, pressing gently to fill corners. Trim excess dough that drapes over the rim.
2. Prick base all over with a fork, cover with a sheet of parchment, and fill with pie weights or a cup of dry beans. Bake for 12 minutes at 400 F, remove weights/beans and parchment, then bake another 12 minutes until golden. Set aside to cool while preparing filling.
3. Zest and juice five lemons. Put lemon zest into food processor and blend until fine. Add in 1.5 cups cane sugar and combine well.
4. In a stand mixer, cream 1 stick of room-temperature butter until smooth. Add in the zest and sugar.
5. When well blended, add in 4 large room-temperature eggs one at a time, then 1 pinch salt. Blend well. (Batter may be lumpy, but it will come together over heat.)
6. Transfer batter to a 2-quart saucepan. Simmer over medium heat, stirring frequently, until batter thickens and temperature reaches 175 degrees.
7. Pour filling into baked tart shell. Let set at room temperature. Once firm, transfer to the fridge.
8. To serve, lift tart out of pan rim and garnish with fresh berries, whipped cream, or a simple dusting of powdered sugar.

### **SAN FRANCISCO PISCO PUNCH**

Pisco Punch was made famous by a San Francisco barman at the Bank Exchange Saloon at the turn of the century, and he took the recipe to his grave. We gave it our best shot—proper Pisco punch should, in the words of its admirers, taste like lemonade and make a gnat want to fight an elephant!

1. For two cocktails, add 1 oz fresh lemon juice, 2 oz pineapple juice, and 4 oz pisco (Peruvian grape brandy, available at most good liquor stores) to a cocktail shaker.
  2. Add ice and a drizzle of simple syrup, pineapple syrup, or honey (adjust to taste, depending how sweet you like your drinks).
  3. Shake well and pour into chilled glasses over ice. Garnish with a slice of lemon and enjoy!
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## THE PHOENIX CROWN Playlist

Listen to the playlist here: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/00nphg4iqkP76Dyx3G3XUF>

## Further Reading

### NONFICTION

*The Earth Shook, The Sky Burned* by William Bronson

*The Edwardian Guide To Life* by Cornelia Dobbs

*After the Ruins 1906 & 2006* by Mark Klett with Michael Lundgren

*Disaster! The Great San Francisco Earthquake and Fire of 1906* by Dan Kurzman

*The Great San Francisco Earthquake and Fire, 1906* by Eric Saul & Don Denevi

*The White Devil's Daughters* by Julia Flynn Siler

*Alice Eastwood's Wonderland* by Carol Green Wilson

*Paris was a Woman* by Andrea Weiss

*Genthe's Photographs of San Francisco's Old Chinatown* with photographs by Arnold Genthe. Highly recommended, with some photos taken shortly before and after the earthquake. A unique photographic social history.

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