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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Celeste Ng is the author of two novels, *Everything I Never Told You* and *Little Fires Everywhere.*

Her first novel, *Everything I Never Told You* (2014), was a *New York Times* bestseller, a *New York Times* Notable Book of 2014, Amazon's #1 Best Book of 2014, and named a best book of the year by over a dozen publications. *Everything I Never Told You* was also the winner of the Massachusetts Book Award, the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature, and the ALA's Alex Award. It has been translated into over thirty languages and is being adapted for the screen.

Celeste's second novel, *Little Fires Everywhere* (2017) was a #1 *New York Times* bestseller, a #1 Indie Next bestseller, and Amazon's Best Fiction Book of 2017. It was named a best book of the year by over 25 publications, the winner of the Ohioana Award and the Goodreads Readers Choice Award 2017 in Fiction, and has spent over a year on the *New York Times* bestseller list. *Little Fires Everywhere* has been published abroad in more than 30 languages and has been adapted as a limited series on Hulu, starring Reese Witherspoon and Kerry Washington.

Celeste grew up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Shaker Heights, Ohio. She graduated from Harvard University and earned an MFA from the University of Michigan (now the Helen Zell Writers' Program at the University of Michigan). Her fiction and essays have appeared in the *New York Times, The Guardian,* and many other publications, and she is a recipient of the Pushcart Prize, a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, and a Guggenheim Fellowship, among other honors.

- Author's website.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the relationships between Nath, Lydia, and Hannah. How do the siblings both understand and mystify one another?

2. Why do you think Lydia is the favorite child of James and Marilyn? How does this pressure affect Lydia, and what kind of impact do you think it has on Nath and Hannah, who are often overlooked by their parents?

3. "So part of him wanted to tell Nath that he knew: what it was like to be teased, what it was like to never fit in. The other part of him wanted to shake his son, to slap him. To shape him into something different…When Marilyn asked what happened, James said merely, with a wave of the hand, 'Some kids teased him at the pool yesterday. He needs to learn to take a joke.'" How did you react to the "Marco polo" pool scene with James and Nath? What do you think of James's decision?

4. Discuss a situation in which you've felt like an outsider. How do the members of the Lee family deal with being measured against stereotypes and others' perceptions?

5. What is the meaning of the novel's title? To whom do the "I" and "you" refer?

6. What would have happened if Lydia had reached the dock? Do you think she would have been able to change her parents' views and expectations of her?

7. This novel says a great deal about the influence our parents can have on us. Do you think the same issues will affect the next generation of Lees? How did your parents influence your childhood?

8. "It struck her then, as if someone had said it aloud: her mother was dead, and the only thing worth remembering about her, in the end, was that she cooked. Marilyn thought uneasily of her own life, of hours spent making breakfasts, serving dinners, packing lunches into neat paper bags." Discuss the relationship Marilyn and her mother have to cooking and their roles as stay-at-home mothers. Do you think one is happier or more satisfied?

9. The footprint on the ceiling brings Nath and Lydia closer when they are young, and later, Hannah and James discover it together and laugh. What other objects bring the characters closer together or drive them further apart?

10. There's so much that the characters keep to themselves. What do you wish they had shared with one another? Do you think an ability to better express themselves would have changed the outcome of the book?

11. Compare this book to others your group has read. Is it similar to any of them? Did you like it more or less than other books you've read? What do you think will be your lasting impression of the book? What will be your most vivid memories of it a year from now? Or will it just leave a vague impression, and what will that be? Or will you not think of it at all in a year's time?

12. Has this novel changed you—broadened your perspective? Have you learned something new or been exposed to different ideas about people or a certain part of the world?

13. Finally, what else struck you about the book as good or bad? What did you like or dislike about it that we haven't discussed already? Were you glad you read this book? Would you recommend it to a friend? Did this book make you want to read more work by this author?

https://readinggroupchoices.com/books/everything-i-never-told-you/

BOOK REVIEWS

Booklist

/* Starred Review */ A teenage girl goes missing and is later found to have drowned in a nearby lake, and suddenly a once tight-knit family unravels in unexpected ways. As the daughter of a college professor and his stay-at-home wife in a small Ohio town in the 1970s, Lydia Lee is already unwittingly part of the greater societal changes going on all around her. But Lydia suffers from pressure that has nothing to do with tuning out and turning on. Her father is an American born of first-generation Chinese immigrants, and his ethnicity, and hers, make them conspicuous in any setting. Her mother is white, and their interracial marriage raises eyebrows and some intrusive charges of miscegenation. More troubling, however, is her mother's frustration at having given up medical school for motherhood, and how she blindly and selfishly insists that Lydia follow her road not taken. The cracks in Lydia's perfect-daughter foundation grow slowly but erupt suddenly and tragically, and her death threatens to destroy her parents and deeply scar her siblings. Tantalizingly thrilling, Ng's emotionally complex debut novel captures the tension between cultures and generations with the deft touch of a seasoned writer. Ng will be one to watch. -- Haggas, Carol (Reviewed 05-15-2014) (Booklist, vol 110, number 18, p13)

Publisher's Weekly

/* Starred Review */ This emotionally involving debut novel explores themes of belonging using the story of the death of a teenage girl, Lydia, from a mixed-race family in 1970s Ohio. Lydia is the middle and favorite child of Marilyn Walker, a white Virginian, and James Lee, a first-generation Chinese-American. Marilyn and James meet in 1957, when she is a premed at Radcliffe and he, a graduate student, is teaching one of her classes. The two fall in love and marry, over the objections of Marilyn's mother, whose comment on their interracial relationship is succinct: "It's not right." Marilyn gets pregnant and gives up her dream of becoming a doctor, devoting her life instead to raising Lydia and the couple's other two children, Nathan and Hannah. Then Marilyn abruptly moves out of their suburban Ohio home to go back to school, only to return before long. When Lydia is discovered dead in a nearby lake, the family begins to fall apart. As the police try to decipher the mystery of Lydia's death, her family realize that they didn't know her at all. Lydia is remarkably imagined, her unhappy teenage life crafted without an ounce of cliché. Ng's prose is precise and sensitive, her characters richly drawn. Agent: Julie Barer, Barer Literary. (July) --Staff (Reviewed April 14, 2014) (Publishers Weekly, vol 261, issue 15, p)

Library Journal

/* Starred Review */ Ng's debut is one of those aching stories about which the reader knows so much more than any of the characters, even as each yearns for the unknowable truth. "Lydia is dead," the novel opens—blunt, unnerving, devastating. She's only 16, the middle of three children of James and Marilyn Lee, a mixed-race couple married years before the ironically named Loving v. Virginia finally invalidated U.S. anti-miscegenation laws in 1967. They're initially drawn together by their differences: James, the American-born son of Chinese immigrants, finishing his Harvard PhD; Marilyn, the only Radcliffe undergraduate determined to become a doctor, a gifted scientist among unbelieving men. When they bury their daughter in 1977, the Lee family—already fragile before the tragedy—implodes. James detaches, Marilyn seeks refuge, brother Nath blames, and youngest Hannah silently watches all. Each will search for a Lydia who doesn't exist, desperate to parse what happened. VERDICT Ng constructs a mesmerizing narrative that shrinks enormous issues of race, prejudice, identity, and gender into the miniaturist dynamics of a single family. A breathtaking triumph, reminiscent of prophetic debuts by Ha Jin, Chang-rae Lee, and Chimamanda Adichie, whose first titles matured into spectacular, continuing literary legacies. [See Prepub Alert, 12/16/13.]— Terry Hong,

Kirkus Reviews

Ng's nuanced debut novel begins with the death of a teenage girl and then uses the mysterious circumstances of her drowning as a springboard to dive into the troubled waters beneath the calm surface of her Chinese-American family. When 16-year-old Lydia Lee fails to show up at breakfast one spring morning in 1977, and her body is later dragged from the lake in the Ohio college town where she and her biracial family don't quite fit in, her parents--blonde homemaker Marilyn and Chinese-American history professor James--older brother and younger sister get swept into the churning emotional conflicts and currents they've long sought to evade. What, or who, compelled Lydia--a promising student who could often be heard chatting happily on the phone; was doted on by her parents; and enjoyed an especially close relationship with her Harvard-bound brother, Nath--to slip away from home and venture out in a rowboat late at night when she had always been deathly afraid of water, refusing to learn to swim? The surprising answers lie deep beneath the surface, and Ng, whose stories have won awards including the Pushcart Prize, keeps an admirable grip on the narrative's many strands as she expertly explores and exposes the Lee family's secrets: the dreams that have given way to disappointment; the unspoken insecurities, betrayals and yearnings; the myriad ways the Lees have failed to understand one another and, perhaps, themselves. These long-hidden, quietly explosive truths, weighted by issues of race and gender, slowly bubble to the surface of Ng's sensitive, absorbing novel and reverberate long after its final page. Ng's emotionally complex debut novel sucks you in like a strong current and holds you fast until its final secrets surface.
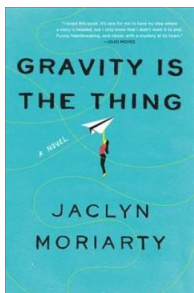
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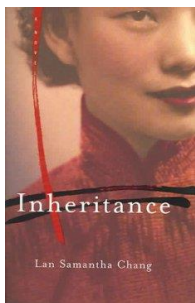
***Inheritance* by Lan Samantha Chang**

Making a pact to stay together after their mother's suicide, Junan and her sister, Yinan, find their vow challenged when Junan is separated from her husband by the Japanese invasion of China and sends Yinan after him.

***Gravity is the Thing* by Jaclyn Moriarty**

Follows a single mother's heartfelt search for more meaningful truths about the universe, her family and herself.
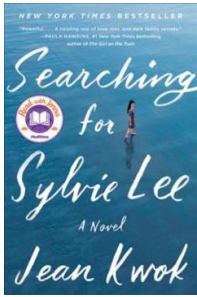
***Searching for Sylvie Lee* by Jean Kwok**

A poignant and suspenseful drama that untangles the complicated ties binding three women—two sisters and their mother—in one Chinese immigrant family and explores what happens when the eldest daughter disappears, and a series of family secrets emerge.