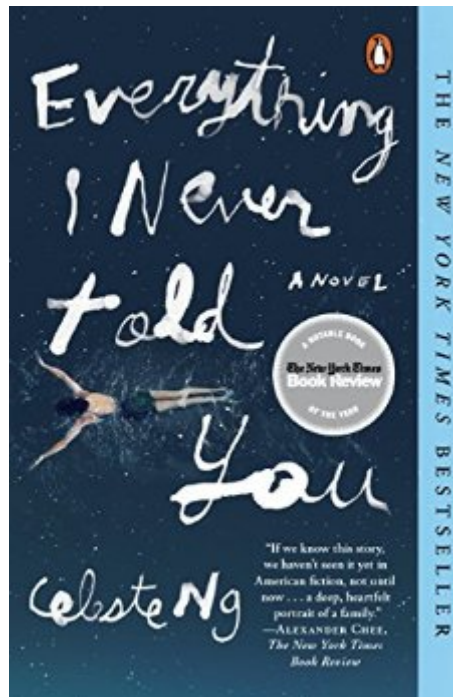


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# Everything I Never Told You: A Novel



## Synopsis

New York Times Bestseller • A New York Times Book Review Editor's Choice • Winner of the Alex Award • Winner of the APALA Award for Fiction • NEA Big Read Selection • NAMED A BEST BOOK OF THE YEAR BY: NPR • San Francisco Chronicle • Entertainment Weekly • The Huffington Post • BuzzFeed • Grantland • Booklist • St. Louis Post Dispatch • Shelf Awareness • Book Riot • School Library Journal • Bustle • Time Out New York • Mashable • Cleveland Plain Dealer

Lydia is dead. But they don't know this yet. • So begins this exquisite novel about a Chinese American family living in 1970s small-town Ohio. Lydia is the favorite child of Marilyn and James Lee, and her parents are determined that she will fulfill the dreams they were unable to pursue. But when Lydia's body is found in the local lake, the delicate balancing act that has been keeping the Lee family together is destroyed, tumbling them into chaos. A profoundly moving story of family, secrets, and longing, *Everything I Never Told You* is both a gripping page-turner and a sensitive family portrait, uncovering the ways in which mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, and husbands and wives struggle, all their lives, to understand one another.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

How is it possible that this is a first novel? It is so exquisite, so marvelously perfect, so regally quiet and elegant that surely, it must come from the hands of a old soul author. But no. This is Celeste Ng's first novel, and in it, she has painted such a deeply felt, original story. This book shall remain with me for the rest of my days. *Everything I Never Told You* is a story of secrets, of love, of longing, of lies, of race, of identity, and knowledge. The story begins with the death of Lydia, daughter of Marilyn and James, which is told in the first sentence and slowly revealed through the book. Her death drives the narrative, and yet, this story is bigger, grander than this central mystery. Marilyn wanted to defy society's narrow vision of her life and become a doctor, while James is trying to overcome humble beginnings and a society judging him based on his race. Together, they conventions, marry and create a family. Nathan, oldest son on his way to Harvard, Lydia, the middle sister and favorite one, and Hannah, truly growing up invisible. Together, Ng has created a complex, complicated family that rings so true on every page. There isn't a false note in the story. Perhaps the power of this book lies in the writing of Ng. Her prose is lyrical and light, allowing you to float in the scenes, often between characters, as if you are a literary ghost spying on these people. She moves her story along when it needs to, and allows certain scenes to linger when needed. The effect is magnificent. She also imbues the realities of racism, that appropriately jar the reader, which at first seem to be just a "matter of the times" (she painfully uses the word Oriental to describe people) but in reality plays a bigger role in the story. I appreciated it.

I am stunned that this is Celeste Ng's first novel. I was instantly drawn into this book, with its beautifully drawn characters and superb writing. On its surface, the story is a mystery: What led to the death of Lydia Lee, a sixteen-year-old honor student with (supposedly) everything to live for? In reality, the mystery goes far deeper, into the lives of each member of the family. By the end of the book, the reader is fully in sympathy with each character. The novel, which takes place in the late 70s, begins with Lydia's death. Was it murder? Was it suicide? Or was it something else? The reader spends most of the novel thinking one thing, only to be surprised at the end with the truth. The author delves into the lives of each family member: James, the father, who never felt really at home in any situation; Marilyn, the mother, whose dreams were shelved by the demands of marriage, family, and the times; Nathan, the older brother, whose brilliance is overlooked; Lydia, the golden child burdened with all the frustrated aspirations of her parents; and Hannah, the overlooked

afterthought of a child, a silent but keen observer of everyone in her family. (I was torn between imagining the author as Lydia or as Hannah; I suspect she is an amalgam of both.) Many chapters in this novel focus on just one character, telling the story from his or her point of view. The reader is led to an understanding of just how profoundly even the best intentions can go terribly awry. Once again, we see people living out their own frustrated dreams through their children, who may or may not be on board. The term "helicopter parent" comes to mind, though this idea was not in vogue until the 90s.

Stereotypes. Appearances. Expectations. They blind us to each other and skew communication in so many ways. Each member of the Lee family sees the world through his or her own experiences and cannot understand how this affects others. Nothing unusual here--we all have our viewpoints and unintentional blinders. What sets *Everything I Never Told You* apart and makes the book special is twofold: beautiful plotting and beautiful writing. The plot is a graceful blending of present and past. Page one reveals that sixteen-year-old Lydia Lee is dead, but she comes to life for the reader when Chapter Two asks "How had it begun?" The answer travels back two generations, revealing dreams and disappointments of her parents, grandparents, older brother and younger sister, while also showing the actions and reactions of her family in the aftermath of her death. Each family member has a different thought about what happened to Lydia, and we don't learn the truth until the very end. In this regard, it's a successful mystery. But it's also much more. Lydia's Chinese father, James, has felt defined by racial stereotypes all his life. Lydia's caucasian mother, Marilyn, has been governed by her own mother's need to maintain proper appearances. The unrealistic expectations James and Marilyn place on their own children have molded Lydia and her siblings, Nathan and Hannah. The writing is nuanced and gentle. No sledgehammers here--the reader is allowed to knit together the pieces of the individual characters' stories to see a bigger picture. These are people who are trying to do the right thing from their own perspective, and their conflicts come about because they don't realize that situations look completely different to someone else.

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