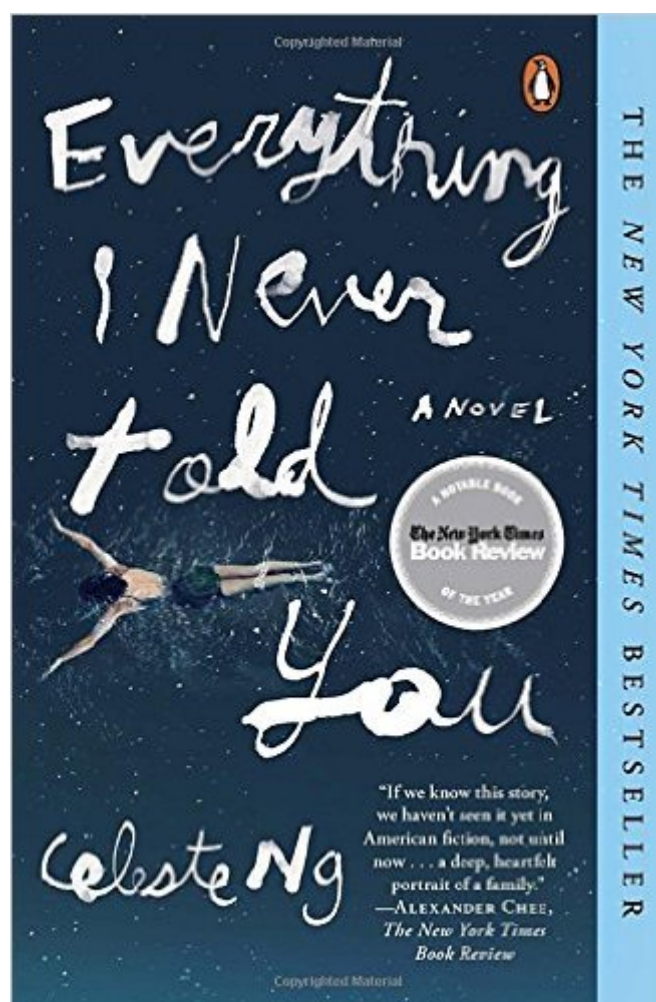


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# Everything I Never Told You



## 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.

## 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. By the time you read the final page, you realize Ng has managed to create such a reality, and that when it ends, there is a sense of loss. Much like the family must deal with the loss of Lydia, we must deal with the loss of these imperfect and real people. This book reveals much, about them, about us, about our country, about our society. It is a book that begs for conversation, that begs to be discussed, interpreted, and argued over. It is a book that will be with you for a long time. I cannot recommend this book highly enough.

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. In addition, issues of race in America and women's roles are explored through the parents, James and Marilyn, who came of age in the 60s and early 70s at the height of the sexual and civil rights revolutions. Even gay identity comes into play, and remember that this novel is set in 1977, not 2014. I am compelled to praise the writing of this book. Both psychologically astute and poetic, it draws the reader into the story and evokes sympathy and awe. We see the devastating grief that overtakes each member of the family as he or she tries to see why Lydia died and what he or she may have done to prevent it. I also loved the way the author treated memory, that old deceiver, who smooths out that which we cannot bear to recall. I do not think this book is marketed as a YA novel, but it is certainly a book that parents and teenagers may profitably read and discuss together. The issues are fresh and relevant, and I can imagine that meaningful discussions and insights may result. Highly recommended for all readers 14 and above.

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