



**Title:** Everything I Never Told You

**Author:** Celeste Ng

**Imprint:** Riverhead

**Publisher:** Penguin Publishing Group

**On sale date:** May 12, 2015

**ISBN:** 9780143127550

**Format:** Paperback

# BOOK RESUME: EVERYTHING I NEVER TOLD YOU

## BOOK SYNOPSIS

“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.

## REVIEWS AND PRAISE

“If we know this story, we haven’t seen it yet in American fiction, not until now . . . Ng has set two tasks in this novel’s doubled heart—to be exciting, and to tell a story bigger than whatever is behind the crime. She does both by turning the nest of familial resentments into at least four smaller, prickly mysteries full of secrets the family members won’t share . . . What emerges is a deep, heartfelt portrait of a family struggling with its place in history, and a young woman hoping to be the fulfillment of that struggle. This is, in the end, a novel about the burden of being the first of your kind—a burden you do not always survive.” —Alexander Chee, bestselling author of *Edinburgh* and *The Queen of the Night*

“Both a propulsive mystery and a profound examination of a mixed-race family, Ng’s explosive debut chronicles the plight of Marilyn and James Lee after their favored daughter is found dead in a lake.” —*Entertainment Weekly*

“Excellent . . . an accomplished debut . . . heart-wrenching . . . Ng deftly pulls together the strands of this complex, multigenerational novel. *Everything I Never Told You* is an engaging work that casts a powerful light on the secrets that have kept an American family together—and that finally end up tearing it apart.” —*Los Angeles Times*

“Tender and merciless all at once . . . Vital in all the essential ways.” —Jesmyn Ward, author of *Sing, Unburied, Sing*, a National Book Award winner

“Wonderfully moving . . . Emotionally precise . . . A beautifully crafted study of dysfunction and grief . . . [This book] will resonate with anyone who has ever had a family drama.” —*Boston Globe*

“A powerhouse of a debut novel, a literary mystery crafted out of shimmering

Updated 10-31-2024

Penguin Random House

Contact [BannedBooks@penguinrandomhouse.com](mailto:BannedBooks@penguinrandomhouse.com)

\*Publisher suggested age range covers the wide range of readers publishers envision using the book, whether for independent reading, family sharing, group study, or in other ways. Educators have the best sense of the appropriate range for their diverse learners they work with and understand these ranges vary depending on a book’s intended use.

prose and precise, painful observation about racial barriers, the burden of familial expectations, and the basic human thirst for belonging . . . Ng’s novel grips readers from page one with the hope of unraveling the mystery behind Lydia’s death—and boy does it deliver, on every front.” —*Huffington Post*

“A subtle meditation on gender, race and the weight of one generation’s unfulfilled ambitions upon the shoulders—and in the heads—of the next . . . Ng deftly and convincingly illustrates the degree to which some miscommunications can never quite be rectified.” —*San Francisco Chronicle*

“Cleverly crafted, emotionally perceptive . . . Ng sensitively dramatizes issues of gender and race that lie at the heart of the story . . . Ng’s themes of assimilation are themselves deftly interlaced into a taut tale of ever deepening and quickening suspense.” —*O, The Oprah Magazine*

“Ng moves gracefully back and forth in time, into the aftermath of the tragedy as well as the distant past, and into the consciousness of each member of the family, creating a series of mysteries and revelations that lead back to the original question: what happened to Lydia? . . . Ng is masterful in her use of the omniscient narrator, achieving both a historical distance and visceral intimacy with each character’s struggles and failures . . . On the surface, Ng’s storylines are nothing new. There is a mysterious death, a family pulled apart by misunderstanding and grief, a struggle to fit into the norms of society, yet in the weaving of these threads she creates a work of ambitious complexity. In the end, this novel movingly portrays the burden of difference at a time when difference had no cultural value . . . Compelling.” —*Los Angeles Review of Books*

“The mysterious circumstances of 16-year-old Lydia Lee’s tragic death have her loved ones wondering how, exactly, she spent her free time. This ghostly debut novel calls to mind *The Lovely Bones*.” —*Marie Claire*

“The first chapter of Celeste Ng’s debut novel is difficult—the oldest daughter in a family is dead—but what follows is a brilliantly written, surprisingly uplifting exploration of striving in the face of alienation and of the secrets we keep from others. This could be my favorite novel of the year.” —Chris Schlupe, *Parade*

“The emotional core of Celeste Ng’s debut is what sets it apart. The different ways in which the Lee family handles Lydia’s death create internal friction, and most impressive is the way Ng handles racial politics. With a deft hand, she loads and unpacks the implications of being the only Chinese American family in a small town in Ohio.” —Kevin Nguyen, *Grantland*

“Beautiful and poignant . . . deftly drawn . . . It’s hard to believe that this is a debut novel for Celeste Ng. She tackles the themes of family dynamics, gender and racial stereotyping, and the weight of expectations, all with insight made more powerful through understatement. She has an exact, sophisticated touch with her prose. The sentences are straightforward. She evokes emotions through devastatingly detailed observations.” —*Cleveland Plain-Dealer*

“Perceptive . . . a skillful and moving portrayal of a family in pain . . . It is to Ng’s

Updated 10-31-2024

Penguin Random House

Contact [BannedBooks@penguinrandomhouse.com](mailto:BannedBooks@penguinrandomhouse.com)

\*Publisher suggested age range covers the wide range of readers publishers envision using the book, whether for independent reading, family sharing, group study, or in other ways. Educators have the best sense of the appropriate range for their diverse learners they work with and understand these ranges vary depending on a book’s intended use.

credit that it is sometimes difficult for the reader to keep going; the pain and unhappiness is palpable. But it is true to the Lees, and Ng tells all.” —*Minneapolis Star Tribune*

“Impressive . . . In its evocation of a time and place and society largely gone but hardly forgotten, *Everything I Never Told You* tells much that today’s reader should learn, ponder and appreciate.” —*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

#### **AWARDS AND ACCOLADES**

- A *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year
- Winner of the Alex Award
- Winner of the Massachusetts Book Award
- Named a Best Book of the Year by NPR
- A *New York Times Book Review* Editor’s Choice

#### **MEDIA AND RESOURCES**

- [Reading Guide](#)
- [Discussion Questions](#)
- [First-Year and Common Reading Resource Guide](#)

#### **RESPONSE TO CHALLENGES**

- [“Celeste Ng, other local literary lights headline Spell-O-Rama to fight book banning efforts in Florida,” \*Boston Globe\* \(2023\)](#)

Updated 10-31-2024

Penguin Random House

Contact [BannedBooks@penguinrandomhouse.com](mailto:BannedBooks@penguinrandomhouse.com)

\*Publisher suggested age range covers the wide range of readers publishers envision using the book, whether for independent reading, family sharing, group study, or in other ways. Educators have the best sense of the appropriate range for their diverse learners they work with and understand these ranges vary depending on a book’s intended use.