

Everything I never told you

Celeste Ng

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Everything I Never Told You it opens with the death of sixteen-year-old Lydia, the middle child of Marilyn and James Lee. Marilyn and James are a mixed-race couple, with Marilyn being Caucasian and James being Chinese. In their small town of Ohio in the seventies, such a marriage is extremely uncommon. Marilyn was raised in Virginia by her single mother, a home ec teacher whose greatest dream for her daughter was to marry a Harvard man. Marilyn on the other hand, wishes to do far more than just be a housewife. She excels in school (physics and chemistry in particular) and earns a scholarship to Radcliffe. Later, she meets James Lee, a fourth year graduate student and teacher for "The Cowboy in American Culture." Their romantic connection begins when after the very first class, Marilyn goes to his office and shyly kisses him. She is attracted to him because he knows what it's like to be different, as someone who has been marginalised his whole life for being Chinese. He is enamored with her for a polar opposite reason -- with her blonde hair and blue eyes, she fit right in.

The novel explains how Marilyn and James' backgrounds affects their whole family, which also includes an older brother and younger sister to Lydia. Out of her three siblings, Lydia was the favourite child in the family, and both parents projected their hopes and wishes onto her. Lydia is put under pressure by her mother to excel academically, while her father pressures her to be popular and belong in their small town. When she disappears and later turns up dead, their entire family dynamic is disrupted. Her father enters in an affair, her mother grows depressed and suspicious, and her siblings are distraught. The conclusion of the novel reveals that Lydia did not commit suicide nor was she murdered but that she actually tragically died of an accident at the lake after she finally figured out her sense of direction in life.

This novel is written extremely well. The narrative crafted by author Celeste Ng is immensely compelling, with all of the characters in the novel having such a distinct personality. The back story into Marilyn and James' upbringings are pivotal for understanding how they behave as parents, as both of them feel like they are missing something within them. For Marilyn, that's the medical degree she was never able to pursue as a result of her three children; for James, it's the feeling of belonging that he always yearned for and never quite attained. I would highly recommend that readers purchase this novel and read it multiple times for all of the clever little details to sink in. The age target should be around 14+ for it discusses sexual relationships at times.

Recommended titles:

Little Fires Everywhere by Celeste Ng

Gone Girl by Gillian Flynn

The Girl On The Train by Paula Hawkins