



## Little Fires Everywhere (Ng)

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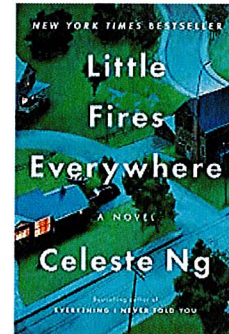
### Little Fires Everywhere

Celeste Ng, 2017

Penguin Publishers

352 pp.

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### Summary

*From the bestselling author of Everything I Never Told You, a riveting novel that traces the intertwined fates of the picture-perfect Richardson family and the enigmatic mother and daughter who upend their lives.*

In Shaker Heights, a placid, progressive suburb of Cleveland, everything is planned — from the layout of the winding roads, to the colors of the houses, to the successful lives its residents will go on to lead.

And no one embodies this spirit more than Elena Richardson, whose guiding principle is playing by the rules.

Enter Mia Warren — an enigmatic artist and single mother — who arrives in this idyllic bubble with her teenaged daughter Pearl, and rents a house from the Richardsons. Soon Mia and Pearl become more than tenants: all four Richardson children are drawn to the mother-daughter pair.

But Mia carries with her a mysterious past and a disregard for the status quo that threatens to upend this carefully ordered community.

When old family friends of the Richardsons attempt to adopt a Chinese-American baby, a custody battle erupts that dramatically divides the town — and puts Mia and Elena on opposing sides. Suspicious of Mia and her motives, Elena is determined to uncover the secrets in Mia's past. But her obsession will come at unexpected and devastating costs.

*Little Fires Everywhere* explores the weight of secrets, the nature of art and identity, and the ferocious pull of motherhood — and the danger of believing that following the rules can avert disaster. (From the publisher.)

#### Author Bio

- Birth—ca. 1980-81
- Raised—Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Shaker Heights, Ohio, USA
- Education—Harvard University; M.F.A., Michigan University
- Awards—Hopwood Award; Pushcart Prize
- Currently—lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts

Celeste Ng [*pronounced "ing"*] grew up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Shaker Heights, Ohio, in a family of scientists. She attended Harvard University and earned an MFA from the University of Michigan (now the Helen Zell Writers' Program at the University of Michigan), where she won the Hopwood Award.

Her debut novel, *Everything I Never Told You* (2014) was a New York Times bestseller and was also included as one of the paper's Notable Books of the Year. It was named a best book of the year by more than a dozen other publications, won several awards, and was a finalist for others.

*Little Fires Everywhere* (2017), Ng's second novel, was also published to rave and starred reviews.

Her fiction and essays have appeared in *One Story*, *TriQuarterly*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Kenyon Review Online*, and elsewhere, and she is the recipient of the Pushcart Prize. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with her husband and son. (*Adapted from the publisher.*)

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#### Book Reviews

Celeste Ng's fine new novel is a perfect demonstration of mathematics' chaos theory — the idea that small changes in organized systems lead to large variations in outcome (the butterfly effect). Or maybe it's Murphy's law — if something can go wrong, it will.... Ng is a young writer who has already revealed her gifts with her 2014 debut, *Everything I Never Told You*. In this second novel, she continues to astound us with the maturity of her insights, complicated characters, and impressive writing. Highly recommended. [READ MORE...](#)

**P.J. Adler - LitLovers**

[Ng's] descriptions are so dead-on you can practically see the Cleveland skyline as you ride shotgun with these characters.

**Glamour**

Takes unerring aim at upper-middle-class America's blind spots.... [A] nuanced study of mothers and daughters and the burden of not belonging to our families or our communities.

**Vogue**

Totally absorbing, each character drawn so well it makes it impossible to decide whose side you're on.

**Marie Claire**

Fans of novelist Celeste Ng...can rejoice....The story drifts effortlessly between characters; each is full and memorable as they coax the novel to its fiery climax. Ng reminds us that action is a choice, and you'll want to keep reading until the last irreversible actions play out.

**Bust**

A captivating examination of motherhood, identity, family, privilege, and community.

**Buzzfeed**

Ng's uncanny ability to embody multiple viewpoints makes for a powerful, revelatory novel.

**BBC**

The un-put-downable story that everyone will be talking about.... A must read for book clubs.

**PopSugar**

(*Starred review.*) An intricate and captivating portrait of an eerily perfect suburban town with its dark undertones not-quite-hidden from view and a powerful and suspenseful novel about motherhood.... [A]n impressive accomplishment.

**Publishers Weekly**

(*Starred review.*) Shaker Heights native Ng writes what she knows into a magnificent, multilayered epic that's perfect for eager readers and destined for major award lists. —Terry Hong, *Smithsonian BookDragon*, Washington, DC

**Library Journal**

(*Starred review.*) Ng's stunning second novel is a multilayered examination of how identities are forged and maintained, how families are formed and friendships tested, and how the notion of motherhood is far more fluid than bloodlines would suggest.... [A] tour de force

**Booklist**

(Starred review.) The characters she creates here are wonderfully appealing.... With her second novel, Ng further proves she's a sensitive, insightful writer with a striking ability to illuminate life in America.

### **Kirkus Reviews**

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#### **Discussion Questions**

*We'll add publisher questions if and when they're available; in the meantime, use our LitLovers talking points to help start a discussion for Little Fires Everywhere ... then take off on your own:*

1. How would you describe Mrs. Richardson and Mia, the two mothers in this novel? In what ways are they different? Why might the former always be referred to as "Mrs." rather than Elena, while Mia is always referred to by her first name? Clearly it is done purposely by the author: how does it shape the way we feel about the two women?
2. Talk about the four Richardson children, Lexi, Trip, Moody, and Izzy. Are any of the four more sympathetic than others? What is their relationship to one another? How does their affluence shape their outlooks on life?
3. Now consider Pearl: what is she like a character? How has her peripatetic upbringing, being uprooted frequently, shape her view of things? What draws her to the Richardsons?
4. Why is Moody drawn to Pearl? What does she offer him? What attracts Lexi to Pearl, certainly an unlikely friendship? In fact, overall, how is Pearl thought of/treated in the family? What does Mia think of her daughter's involvement with the Richardsons?
5. What about Izzy? Why is Mrs. Richardson more impatient with and critical of her than with the others? From the novel's first paragraph, we are told that people always thought Izzy somewhat of a "lunatic." Is that a fair assessment? As the novel progresses, what do you learn about her lunacy.
6. Why is Izzy drawn to Mia, and vice versa? What do the two see in one another?
7. What were your thoughts regarding the Mirabelle McCullough / May Ling Chow case? Whose side were on? Did your allegiance change?
8. How are class and race treated in this novel? What impact do they have on the story's events and the way the characters respond?
9. Describe Shaker Heights and its sense of itself as a refuge and "a little bit of heaven on earth." Would you enjoy living there or somewhere like it? Consider why Celeste Ng might have set her novel in such a place?

10. The novel's opening begins with the fire and then goes backward in time to trace events leading up to it. Why might Celeste Ng have structured her novel to begin with the ending and the most dramatic event? How does the reverse structure affect your reading of the story?

11. How does Mrs. Richardson respond to the fire — immediately and then later at night. What does she come to realize about Izzy and her role in her daughter's behavior. Does she gain your sympathy at the end?

12. What do you think/hope will happen to Izzy, Mia, and Pearl?

13. What is the significance of the title: to what do the "little fires everywhere" refer?

*(Questions by LitLovers. Please feel free to use them, online or off, with attribution. Thanks.)*

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