Forget Sorrow: An Ancestral Tale

by Belle Yang



About the Book

When Belle Yang was forced to take refuge in her parents? home after an abusive boyfriend began stalking her, her father entertained her with stories of old China. The history she?d ignored while growing up became a source of comfort and inspiration, and narrowed the gap separating her --- an independent, Chinese-American woman --- from her Old World Chinese parents.

In *Forget Sorrow*, Yang makes her debut into the graphic form with the story of her father?s family, reunited under the House of Yang in Manchuria during the Second World War and struggling --- both together and individually --- to weather poverty, famine, and, later, Communist oppression. The parallels between Belle Yang?s journey of self-discovery and the lives and choices of her grandfather, his brothers, and their father (the Patriarch) speak powerfully of the conflicts between generations --- and of possibilities for reconciliation.

Forget Sorrow demonstrates the power of storytelling and remembrance, as Belle --- in telling this story --- finds the strength to honor both her father and herself.

Discussion Guide

1.) Family traditions play a large role in Xuan?s life. How does her culture compare to yours? Are their traditions that are multicultural?

2.) How do her father?s stories bring Xuan closer to her Chinese heritage? What does she gain?

3.) How do Xuan?s struggles to find herself parallel those of her father?s?

4.) Knowing your self-worth is an important theme throughout the novel. What does it mean to know your worth? Why is this important?

5.) Both Xuan?s and her father?s family are surrounded by acts of violence. How does the art of storytelling counteract violence? How does violence ultimately bring Xuan?s family together?

6.) Why do you think the author chose the graphic novel format to tell her story? How does it help the reader enter the author?s culture?

7.) In Chinese, names are a way to shape a child. How is each of the character?s names reflective of their personality? Do they live up to their parent?s expectations?

8.) The women in the father?s story are generally in the background: present but uninvolved. How has the role of women changed since the early twentieth century? Compare Xuan?s mother and Xuan to the brother?s wives.

9.) Xuan?s grandfather says, ?We are responsible for what happens to ourselves. We bring bad luck down upon our own heads.? Do you think this is true? Does Xuan?s story conform to this thinking?

10.) How does remembering the past help Xuan in her present and future? How did her reflection on the past engage your memories of the past?

11.) The Chinese language is made up of a series of ?pictures? called pictographs and ideographs, and horizontal hand scrolls were an artist?s medium to depict a moving landscape. How might these techniques and traditions relate to the way in which Belle has chosen to tell her story?

Author Bio

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