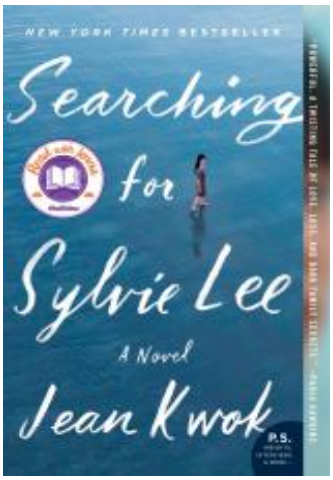
Searching for Sylvie Lee

by Jean Kwok



About the Book

SEARCHING FOR SYLVIE LEE is a poignant and suspenseful drama that untangles the complicated ties binding three women --- two sisters and their mother --- in one Chinese immigrant family and explores what happens when the eldest daughter disappears, and a series of family secrets emerge, from the *New York Times* bestselling author of GIRL IN TRANSLATION.

It begins with a mystery. Sylvie, the beautiful, brilliant, successful older daughter of the Lee family, flies to the Netherlands for one final visit with her dying grandmother --- and then vanishes.

Amy, the sheltered baby of the Lee family, is too young to remember a time when her parents were newly immigrated and too poor to keep Sylvie. Seven years older, Sylvie was raised by a distant relative in a faraway, foreign place and didn?t rejoin her family in America until age nine. Timid and shy, Amy has always looked up to her sister, the fierce and fearless protector who showered her with unconditional love.

But what happened to Sylvie? Amy and her parents are distraught and desperate for answers. Sylvie has always looked out for them. Now, it?s Amy?s turn to help. Terrified yet determined, Amy retraces her sister?s movements, flying to the last place Sylvie was seen. But instead of simple answers, she discovers something much more valuable: the truth. Sylvie, the golden girl, kept painful secrets...secrets that will reveal more about Amy?s complicated family --- and herself --- than she ever could have imagined.

A deeply moving story of family, secrets, identity and longing, SEARCHING FOR SYLVIE LEE is both a gripping page-turner and a sensitive portrait of an immigrant family. It is a profound exploration of the many ways culture and language can divide us and the impossibility of ever truly knowing someone --- especially those we love.

Discussion Guide

1. How do the members of the Lee family deal with being measured against stereotypes, language barriers and others' perceptions? Have you ever felt like an outsider?

2. Discuss the relationship between Amy and Sylvie. How do the siblings both understand and mystify one another?

3. How is this immigrant family like others you've seen or read about? What about their experiences do you think are universal or unique?

4. How does Kwok represent the different languages in each chapter? Did any idioms or word orders surprise you or make you think? Why do you think Kwok chose to depict language this way?

5. This novel says a great deal about the influence our families can have on us. How did Amy and Sylvie?s different upbringings shape them and their choices? Did anything about your own upbringing strongly influence you?

6. Did your perception of Ma change when you read her chapters? How did she appear through other?s eyes in comparison to how she sees herself? Do you think others see you the way you really are?

7. Do you think any of the characters in the novel are reliable narrators? Can any narrator be truly reliable, or are we all colored by our perceptions and misunderstandings?

8. What is the price of the American dream? Who pays for it? How does the lifestyle in Europe compare?

9. Amy and Sylvie perceive the Netherlands differently. How do their impressions of the landscape and the people --- especially Filip and Lukas --- demonstrate their own characters?

10. Has reading this novel deepened your understanding of the implications of casual racism, even toward well-integrated people? Did any instances in the novel surprise you? Have you ever encountered situations like this in your life?

11. Different men love Sylvie in this novel. How did their love differ, and why?

12. Why do you think Helena resented Sylvie? How deserved do you think it was?

13. There are so many secrets that the characters keep to themselves. What do you wish they had shared with each other, and how might this have changed the plot? Are secrets always bad, or are they sometimes necessary? Have you ever kept secrets from people you loved?

14. Do you think the novel?s title, "Searching for Sylvie Lee," has multiple meanings?

Author Bio

Jean Kwok is the *New York Times* and internationally bestselling author of DOMINION, THE LEFTOVER WOMAN, SEARCHING FOR SYLVIE LEE, GIRL IN TRANSLATION and MAMBO IN CHINATOWN. Her books have been chosen by th

In between her bachelor?s degree from Harvard and her MFA from Columbia, Kwok worked as a professional ballroom dancer. He

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