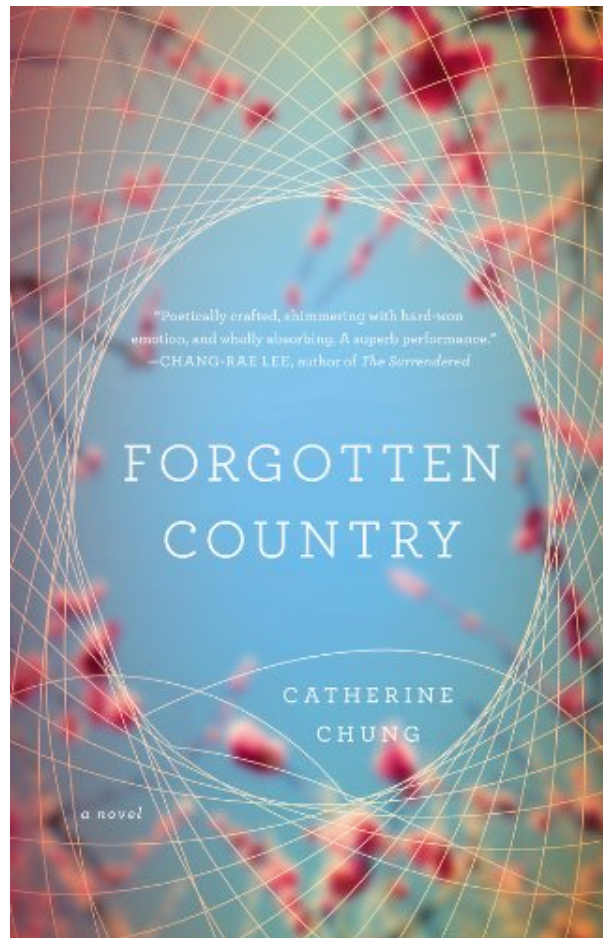
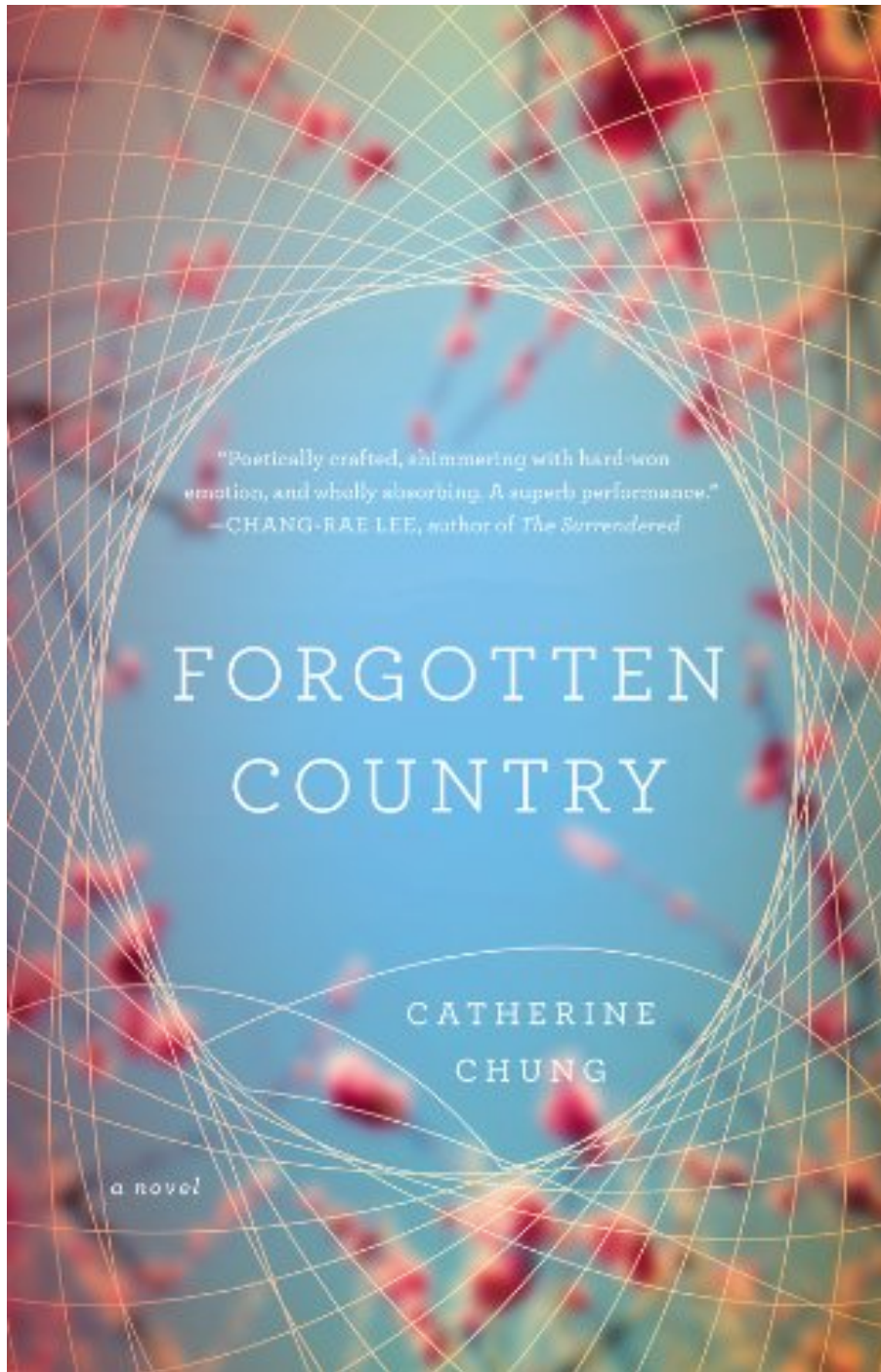


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A Booklist Top 10 First Novels of 2012 pick

A Bookpage Best Books of 2012 pick

On the night Janie waits for her sister, Hannah, to be born, her grandmother tells her a story: Since the Japanese occupation of Korea, their family has lost a daughter in every generation, so Janie is charged with keeping Hannah safe. As time passes, Janie hears more stories, while facts remain unspoken. Her father tells tales about numbers, and in his stories everything works out. In her mother's stories, deer explode in fields, frogs bury their loved ones in the ocean, and girls jump from cliffs and fall like flowers into the sea. Within all these stories are warnings.

Years later, when Hannah inexplicably cuts all ties and disappears, Janie embarks on a mission to find her sister and finally uncover the truth beneath her family's silence. To do so, she must confront their history, the reason for her parents' sudden move to America twenty years earlier, and ultimately her conflicted feelings toward her sister and her own role in the betrayal behind their estrangement.

Weaving Korean folklore within a modern narrative of immigration and identity, *Forgotten Country* is a fierce exploration of the inevitability of loss, the conflict between obligation and freedom, and a family struggling to find its way out of silence and back to one another.

- Sales Rank: #432209 in eBooks
- Published on: 2012-03-01
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Most helpful customer reviews

20 of 20 people found the following review helpful.

Forgotten Country

By Leeanna Chetsko

If you've dealt with the loss of a parent or a close family member, "*Forgotten Country*" is a book that will hit home with you. In beautiful, descriptive, and sparse prose, we watch Janie deal with both her father's cancer and the disappearance of her sister.

Janie is trying to be the son her parents never had; she is getting a PhD in mathematics, following her father's dream. When her parents return to Korea to seek cancer treatment for her father, she goes with them. She also tries to find her sister Hannah, who vanished a year ago and hasn't contacted anyone. Janie's family has a legacy -- every generation, one daughter goes missing. Her mother lost her sister, and doesn't want Janie to lose Hannah.

Janie was my favorite character. I could really identify with her struggle of being the dutiful daughter, of feeling obligated to be there for her family. She is resentful of Hannah -- in Janie's eyes, Hannah shirked her family responsibilities by running away. By not being there, Hannah doesn't have to watch their father go downhill.

Hannah has her own reasons for running away, and I won't reveal them because I don't want to spoil the story. I found them slightly anti-climactic. There is also a part where Janie's PhD advisor comes onto her; I thought it was unnecessary, and distracted from the overall story.

I gobbled this book up. The heartbreaking story of Janie watching her father's cancer progress will suck you in, and there's a story within that story: the story of the family's past in a dangerous, divided Korea. Korean folklore is also woven throughout, which I liked as I hadn't read any of it before.

The book's design is also noteworthy. There's an illustration of a bird on a branch at the start of each chapter that's a small but nice touch. The cover is somewhat vague, not offering a clue as to what the story is about. Usually I don't like that, but here I thought it matched the style of writing.

I had a hard time believing this is Chung's first novel. I'll definitely be on the lookout for more by her. I have a feeling "*Forgotten Country*" is one of those books where I'll discover something new every time I read it.

14 of 14 people found the following review helpful.

Powerful novel

By Sara Kovach

Forgotten Country is a very emotionally moving novel full of heartbreak, betrayal, forgiveness, reunion, and death that spans many generations and two countries - America and Korea.

At the heart of this novel are two sisters born in Korea and raised in America by immigrant parents. Younger sister, Hannah, mysteriously leaves, and Janie has the burden and responsibility placed on her by her family to find her and bring her home. The girl's father has become ill, and the urgency to bring Hannah home is intensified.

All I can say is WOW! I read this novel straight through - only stopping to eat, sleep, and shower - and struggled to do so then!!! What a powerful story. So much wrapped up in the pages of this book - so much history - both for the country of Korea and the family involved. The family's past is so entwined in the history of Korea, and it follows them to America. The family dynamics is a very integral part of this novel, especially the connectedness with the generations that remain in Korea - grandmother, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.

I so felt for Janie. So many layers to this character. She has so much responsibility on her shoulders - placed there not only from herself, but her family as well. Her parents never had a son, so felt the pressure to take up many of the duties that a son would have. Always looking after her sister, following in her father's footsteps in her graduate studies, always doing as her parents asked.

Hannah was so different from her sister. She is so distant, so foreign throughout most of the story. Although her story is very deep, it is not until the end that we get to understand just where she is coming from.

Living in America we often take for granted how families work. The culture described in the pages of this book was very fascinating for me to read about - so different from anything I have personally experienced - very informative. The author's writing style makes this story so inviting and easy to read. It is hard to believe that this is her debut novel. I look forward to more from Catherine Chung.

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

An interesting story of family in crisis and heritage...and all the drama that goes with

By Melodie

I give this really 3 1/2 stars. This is an interesting story of the relationships between sisters, fathers and daughters, and the history of a family that had to escape from their homeland Korea to the US only to face bias and isolation.

The author intergrates wonderful fables of Korea and the cultural history within this story of a family struggling to face the crisis of a terminal illness. Any reader who has lost a parent or loved one will understand as the family struggles to ease the patient's pain and come to terms with their own loss.

The author's research of the history and culture of Korea flowed smoothly throughout, and created characters to enhance the theme. The character I really connected with was Janie, the eldest daughter. I found the missing daughter, Hannah's story to be a minor part of this story despite the description of the book. I have to admit there were parts of this story that I caught myself "skimming" instead of reading. There are parts that are too detailed or do not contribute to the story, such as Janie's advisor for her thesis behavior towards her.

One fable that stayed with me was a mother went to Buddha and asked for a miracle to bring her dead child

back to life. He advised that if she could bring him a blanket from a home that had not suffered any sorrow, he would perform a miracle. The mother went door to door trying to find such a home, but alas every home had it's own sorrow. the mother went back to Buddha and advised she learned his lesson...that no one can be spared loss, that this is the cost of life. I agree, but it reminds me that everyone has thier own story of loss and struggles, even if we are not aware of it.

This well written book is will not disappoint.

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