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Savoring the Story Like a Cherry Life Saver Tucked in Your Cheek

In Celeste Ng's debut novel, *Everything I Never Told You*, the author employs several literary devices such as flashbacks, imagery, and symbolism. This paper will focus on the literary device of simile, which Ng uses with verve throughout the entire novel. The story is so plentiful with similes that a reader is hard-pressed to go more than a page or two without seeing an example of one. When young Hannah cannot sleep, she looks out her bedroom window and not only sees the night sky, but the moon drifting by like a slow balloon. Ng writes in pictures, allowing readers to visualize resting birds instead of a couple holding hands, beetles marching down a character's spine rather than someone getting a bad feeling. With the heavy use of similes throughout the novel, Ng stirs emotion, incites empathy, and creates characters as human as the reader, who is hungrily devouring the pages like a fast-melting ice cream cone.

The novel stirs emotion in the reader with everyday images that convey anger, sadness, sensuality, and joy. In general, *Everything I Never Told You* highlights" the sense of alienation, frustration, and depression resulting from distorted family ethics," which is rich soil for all sorts of literary devices (Shen, Yang, 2018). From the first line of the book, it is clear the story will delve into raw emotion. The story's premise is how a family copes with the loss of their teenage daughter and sister, Lydia, who mysteriously drowned in a nearby lake. When Marilyn, Lydia's mother, tries to sleep after the funeral, "her mind whirs to life like an overwound toy" (Ng, p.72). When Hannah climbs into Lydia's bed to feel close to her, "She can almost feel the imprint of her sister's body in the mattress, wrapping her like a warm hug" (Ng, p. 107). In a tense scene where Marilyn and her husband, James, have a particularly explosive argument, letting years of repressed feelings out, James storms out, and "Silence settles over the house like ash" (Ng. p. 245). Rather than saying a character is grief-stricken or scared or happy, simile brings those feelings into focus so readers can relate to emotions so common in the human condition.

The Lee family in Everything I Never Told You are many things, but mostly lost without their cherished Lydia, giving Ng a chance to evoke empathy through similies. Hannah, the youngest daughter, is often ignored, resulting in extreme loneliness. When she reads a cake box that says, "You mix in the love," Hannah decides that "Love…would be sweet, like her mother's perfume, and soft as marshmallows" (Ng, p. 235). The vain craving for something as basic as a mother's love makes Hannah a tragic character and proves fertile ground for excruciating similes. Hannah's isolation is tangible, making clear to the audience that "She knew everything about her family yet no one wanted to know her" (Shen et al.,2018). In the dark days before Lydia's death, she had wanted to find solace in her older brother, Nath, but "pinning down his attention had been like catching smoke in her hands" (Ng, p. 256. It would take a robot to lack empathy for characters so deep in grief, so remorseful of myriad missed opportunities.

One thing that sets memorable stories apart from mediocre ones is the ability to create human characters that seem as real to readers as their friends and families. Ng illustrates humanity in all of her characters, especially the Lee family. Marilyn's immediate reaction to Lydia missing breakfast that first morning is one that any mother could relate to, a sense of dread. Imagining worst-case scenarios, Marilyn cringes in horror, "the small of her back prickles, like beetles marching down her spine" (Ng, p. 7). James, Lydia's father, falls into the arms of another woman, an unfortunately common coping mechanism in the grief process, and revels in the newness of her skin that is "tangy, like citrus" (Ng. p. 71). Ng awakens all of the readers' senses through similes, allowing us to smell, taste, hear, and touch her characters.

In conclusion, *Everything I Never Told You* is a story replete with poignant similes that stir emotions, evoke empathy, and create eerily human characters. When sunlight hits a room like lemon chiffon or wet grass sticks to bare legs like green paint, the result is that a reader goes from holding a book in their hands to diving headfirst into the story, living in the Lee's home, missing Lydia almost as much as her own mother does. Thanks to Ng's rich use of similes, *Everything I Never Told You* is a story I savor like a cherry Life Saver tucked in my cheek. You'll smile at the reference if you are familiar with the book. If not, check out page 21.

Works Cited

Ng, Celeste. Everything I Never Told You. New York :Penguin Press HC, 2014.

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