

BOOKS

THE FIRST MUST-READ OF 2016

*In her gorgeously wrought novel, Janice Y.K. Lee (author of 2009 best-seller *The Piano Teacher*) looks at a child's disappearance in a foreign land and everything that follows*



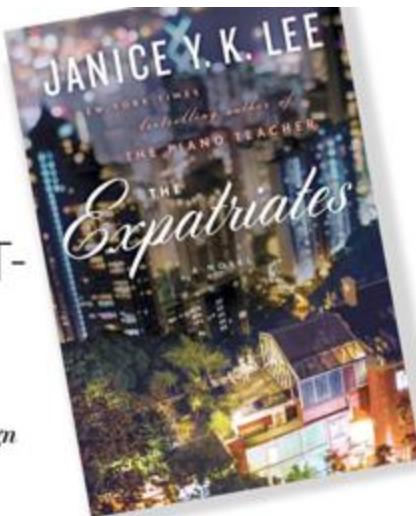
MARIE CLAIRE: Parts of this novel read as autobiographical—have you lived as an expatriate?

JANICE Y.K. LEE: I was born and raised in Hong Kong, although I'm Korean. I came to

the U.S. for several years. And when I said I was going back to Hong Kong, people said, "Oh, you're going home," but I had never lived there as an adult. I lived there as a child of Korean immigrants, and when I went back, it was as an American expat, which is a completely different experience.

MC: Most of your characters are "trailing spouses": women who follow their husbands' careers and, in turn, have certain lifestyle changes.

JYKL: I always say, "What happens when you discover you have eight extra hours in your day?" I think there's this pressure in New York to spend as much time as possible with your child, but in Hong Kong, people felt very comfortable working and doing their own



thing. A lot of women [in my expat community] started small businesses, some started painting or joined the tennis team ... I took that time to finish my first book.

MC: Working on a book about a missing child must be difficult, as it's a very real, very possible real-life scenario. How did you write through that?

JYKL: I got very spooked at one point and thought, I'm not going to write this. I couldn't sleep for several days; I didn't want to call it into my life. I got very superstitious, and I actually put it away and thought, I'm not going to finish this book. It's so frightening to me. And then after six months, I went back to it. It's a scary thing to think about and to immerse yourself in so much grief; it's not the easiest thing to do.

MC: So—what's next?

JYKL: My future is completely about the present. Sometimes I know what's happening the next day, but that's about it! —Steph Opitz

LISTENING

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