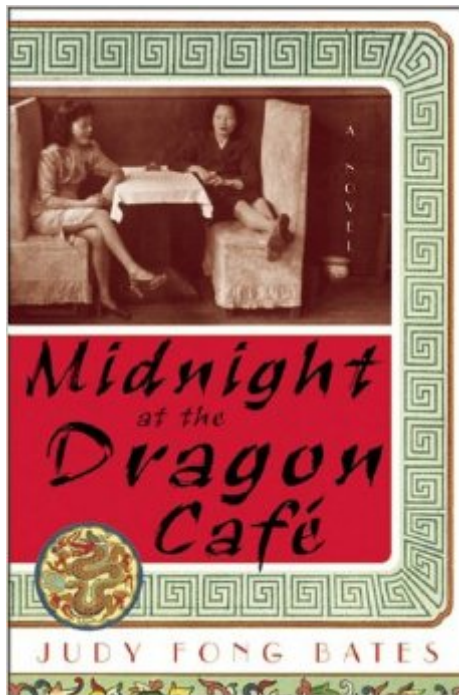


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# Midnight At The Dragon Cafe: A Novel (Alex Awards (Awards))



## Synopsis

The life of a young Chinese girl is torn apart by dark family secrets and divided loyalties in a small Ontario town in the 1950s. Judy Fong Bates's fresh and engaging first novel is the story of Su-Jen Chou, a Chinese girl growing up the only daughter of an unhappy and isolated immigrant family in a small Ontario town in the 1950s. Through Su-Jen's eyes we see the hard life behind the scenes at the Dragon Caf, the local diner her family runs. Her half-brother Lee-Kung smolders under the responsibilities he must carry as the dutiful Chinese son. Her mother, beautiful but bitter, lays her hopes and dreams on Su-Jen's shoulders, until she turns to find solace in the most forbidden of places, while Su-Jen's elderly father strives to *hek fuh*, swallow bitterness, and save face at all costs.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

How genuine this novel is! Having grown up like Su-Jen in a small Ontario town where we were one of the only Chinese families, I totally related to the girl's experience, even though, unlike her, I was born in Canada. The smell, the taste, the look of a small town Chinese-Canadian greasy spoon certainly rang true to my mother's stories about her own family's operation of several caf  s in different Ontario communities. The author evokes the claustrophobic isolation of the family living and working amidst a predominantly white community with such authenticity, it left me breathless, hoping for their emancipation. The story begins with a woman's memory of her childhood, but the story seen through her eyes, is a microcosmic look at a macro-history of these immigrant-run

restaurants. This one, with its particular twists and justifications, I found to be especially poignant and on the mark. I've wished for more stories from Chinese-Canadian authors like those from American author Amy Tan. I think I've finally found one here and now! I'll look forward to the next tale from Judy Fong Bates, a bright new talent.

With a quiet, unassuming elegance, Canadian-Chinese author Judy Fong-Bates sets the scene for her highly applauded debut novel, 'Midnight at the Dragon Cafe'. Perhaps this story touched me more acutely than most of its readers, as it called to mind what my father and his parents must have experienced during and after their immigration from Hong Kong to a little town in Canada in the mid-1950s. Every word to me was genuine, haunting, compelling... Little Su-Jen Chou (at the tender age of six), along with her beautiful yet bitter mother, immigrates to Canada from Communist China, to meet the father she has never known. A father who is the proprietor of the local Canadian-Chinese "greasy spoon". With Su-Jen mother constantly haunted with yearnings for her homeland, unpleasant family secrets uncovered, and the trials and challenges they face in a new and often-times unwelcoming land, Fong-Bates weaves a story full of heartbreak, tribulation and acceptance. Poignant in its simplicity and yet weighty in its inner complexities, 'Midnight at the Dragon Cafe' explores many social issues of the time, along with the disappointments, the pride, the sacrifices, and the triumphs of those who immigrated to Canada in search of something "better". Compelling and well written, Fong-Bates' stunning first novel deserves a heaping spoonful of praise.

A good friend told me that this was the best book she had read in years! I am in total agreement and I will be urging fellow readers to savour the delights of *Midnight at the Dragon Cafe* with the same fervour. Judy Fong Bates's first novel allows one to not only explore the world of the Chinese/Canadian restaurant/greasy spoons that were in every community across Canada, but also discover the loneliness, passions, joys and heartache that were experienced by those who ran the restaurants. The story of young Su-Jen and her family striving for a better life in Canada is a beautifully haunting tale told by a master storyteller. I couldn't recommend it more highly.

I am a fourth generation Chinese American living in California. I loved this well written, lyrical and engaging book, and recommend it to all. I have not read much about the Chinese-Canadian immigrant experience, and this book was very rewarding in terms of telling the story of the Chinese in Canada in the background of the main story line. The characters are extremely vivid in the book, and one really cares about Su-Jen (aka Annie) right away. The author does a very good job of

sketching the lonely life of this isolated Chinese family in this small Canadian town. I particularly felt she handled incidents of racial discrimination experienced by the sensitive Annie during elementary school very poignantly. You really feel for this little Chinese girl, stuck between this lovely unhappy mother, a frustrated and good looking half brother, a traditional but kindly father, and her Canadian white classmates. It is a great read.

This was a good insight in the life of Chinese immigrants in Canada during the Cultural Revolution. Its also a good window into multi-generational and gender role dynamics. The characters in the novel understand how lives will be different for the younger generation, even as they maintain some of their cultural traditions and hold on to their cultural identity.

This is not the sort of book I would normally be drawn to and what a wonderful surprise it was for me. The writing is truly extraordinary and the author has the ability to paint with words so that even a person who has never experienced this young girls experiences is able to feel the feelings and see the places. I was sorry when the book was over and am looking forward to reading her other book.

I purchased this as my research told me that several book clubs had read it. I chose it for my book club's selection one month. Its the only time that we've ended early! Just not a lot of substance here. It was a fairly enjoyable read, but parts were slow-moving.

I recently finished this book and loved the way it was written, the use of language, the lessons of enduring truths of humanity, etc. It was very touching and I loved it. I read it aloud to my 16-year-old son. We have read a lot of books but now I'm stuck and need a recommendation on what to read next.

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