



The Night My Mother Met Bruce Lee: Observations on Not Fitting In

Paisley Rekdal

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When you come from a mixed race background as Paisley Rekdal does — her mother is Chinese American and her father is Norwegian— thorny issues of identity politics, and interracial desire are never far from the surface. Here in this hypnotic blend of personal essay and travelogue, Rekdal journeys throughout Asia to explore her place in a world where one’s “appearance is the deciding factor of one’s ethnicity.”

In her soul-searching voyage, she teaches English in South Korea where her native colleagues call her a “hermaphrodite,” and is dismissed by her host family in Japan as an American despite her assertion of being half-Chinese. A visit to Taipei with her mother, who doesn’t know the dialect, leads to the bitter realization that they are only tourists, which makes her further question her identity. Written with remarkable insight and clarity, Rekdal a poet whose fierce lyricism is apparent on every page, demonstrates that the shifting frames of identity can be as tricky as they are exhilarating.



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