



No Good Very Bad Asian

Leland Cheuk

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Sirius Lee isn't your stereotypical bookish Asian American dude. An outspoken and confrontational comedian, he has popular stand-up albums and appearances in Hollywood blockbusters on his résumé. But underneath the jokes, his wreck of a life is no laughing matter. Leland Cheuk's zippy, acerbic novel *No Good Very Bad Asian* is framed as a letter to Lee's estranged daughter; it focuses on his successes and disasters.

The roly-poly, awkward son of conservative immigrant parents, Lee (whose real name is Hor Luk Lee, prompting unfortunate jokes from his peers) stumbles into success when he befriends a comedian-turned-reality-TV-star, Johnny Razzmatazz. Taking Lee under his wing, Johnny helps break him into the comedy business, though introducing him to plenty of bad influences, too. Fueled by self-hatred and racial insecurity, Lee's soon turning his rage into blistering stand-up routines, landing a spot on an SNL-style comedy show.

Cheuk, who performed stand-up for several years as research for his book, provides an inside look at the topsy-turvy world of comedy, where rising stars mix it up with floundering has-beens. Above all, the novel is a cautionary tale of how even a brush with fame can derail one's perspective, and how racial insensitivity and discrimination persist even in the glitzy depths of Hollywood. For every fleeting bit of success Lee enjoys, there are plenty of lost opportunities, fed by bad luck, the glass ceiling imposed by his ethnic background, and his self-destructive tendencies.

More rueful than laugh-out-loud funny, the novel recounts Lee's life in a conversational, self-deprecating style. Even as the comedian falls from grace and becomes estranged from his family and friends, he remains sympathetic, and although the conclusion of his tale is bittersweet, it leaves hope for forgiveness and redemption. A showbiz crack-up tale with a heart, *No Good Very Bad Asian* is smartly told and deeply felt.

HO LIN (November / December 2019)

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