FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

General

Year of the Smoke Girl
Olivia Boler
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As she lay dying, Khatia Quigley's mother gives Khatia a new name—the Chinese middle name of Wu Shan. This sets Khatia on a journey to define who and what she is, most evidently in terms of sexuality and race. The common "struggle for identity" theme is the core of Boler's promising first novel.

A dead half-Chinese mother, a quiet war-tormented father, a distant brother and a female roommate-turned-lover constitute Khatia's world, one in which she continually feels lost. A year after she and girlfriend Shoshonah graduate from college, Shoshonah asks Khatia to move with her to Amsterdam. Reluctantly, Khatia agrees to leave the safety of her family's New England home in exchange for the freedom of Europe. There, Khatia lands a job reading language tapes with friendly Dutchman, Ulrike, and she and Shoshonah share a few months of happiness.

Shoshonah's problems with monogamy and Khatia's bisexual tendencies soon cast a shadow on the relationship, and Khatia retreats to Paris for a short stint as a nanny. In her European travels, Khatia is constantly asked about her race; as a quarter Chinese, her darker features induce locals to ask if she is Italian, Spanish, or Portuguese, which leads her to question her lack of knowledge about her Chinese heritage. With her mother's dying words haunting her and her father's looming disapproval, Khatia again relocates, this time to her mom's hometown of San Francisco.

Prompted by her brother, Porter, who has also begun to research his Asian roots, and her new boyfriend, Cree, Khatia finds her mother's estranged parents. Having disowned their daughter decades ago, Khatia's grandparents reveal a shocking and disturbing family secret. As she unravels the story of her parents courtship and her father's traumatic experiences in Korea, Khatia breaks her cycle of restlessness and quits smoking after exactly one year.

Boler's strong sense of imagery throughout the novel often gives her writing a lyrical quality. Better organization would have strengthened the narrative (especially with several

voices present), but Boler shows a lot of potential in her willingness to tackle cultural issues on an international canvas.

Rebecca Rego