The Skin Between Us: A Memoir of Race, Beauty, and Belonging by Kym Ragusa

Wow!

A memoir of astonishing delicacy and strength about race and physical beauty. Kym Ragusas stunningly beautiful, brilliant black mother constantly turned heads as she strolled the streets of West Harlem. Ragusas working-class white father, who grew up only a few streets (and an entire world) away in Italian East Harlem, had never seen anyone like her. At home their families despaired at the match, while in the streets the couple faced taunting threats from a city still racially divided—but they were mesmerized by the differences between them. From their volatile, short-lived pairing came a sensitive child with a filmmakers observant eye. Her two powerful grandmothers gave her the love and stability to grow into her own skin. Eventually, their shared care for their granddaughter forced them to overcome their prejudices. Rent parties and religious feste, baked yams and baked ziti—Ragusas sensuous memories are a readers delight, as they bring to life the joy, pain, and inexhaustible richness of a racially and culturally mixed heritage.

My Personal Review:
Kym Ragusa has written a book that is destined to join not only the cannon of multicultural narrative, but that rare class of books that allows us to see ourselves as a reflection of one another. Ragusa takes us on a magical journey through the looking glass to examine racial and cultural identity from the inside out.

Not preachy, not trendy, not PC, and certainly not depressing, Ragusa's writing is delicate and personal, achingly vulnerable. Her prose are as beautiful and complex as the portraits she paints of herself and three generations of women in her family. When Ragusa interrogates the shape of her nose and the texture of her hair, I am reminded that in today's rush to perfectionism through plastic surgery, true beauty (like justice) can best be seen through closed eyes.
Lastly, in this time of growing anxiety over all things foreign, Ragusa teaches us that the American character is at heart multicultural. In reading her beautifully wrought memoir, I again learned that the skin between us can also be the bond between us.

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