



**The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down, by
Anne Fadiman - A Hyperink Quicklet (National
Book Critics Award, Immigrant Life)**

Marcin Ossowski

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Anne Fadiman's seminal work of nonfiction, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, examines the myriad difficulties and complications that arise when two radically different cultures come in to contact with one another. However, the author contextualizes these larger clashes within a much more intimate, and ultimately human, story: that of the travails of a Hmong family, the Lees, who came to the United States in the 1970s from Laos as political refugees, and settled in Merced, California.

The Hmong are an ethnic group that inhabited the mountainous and densely forested highlands of Southeast Asia. They originally hailed from the southern mainland of China as one of the sub-populations of the Miao ethnicity, but were relentlessly subjugated and brutalized by the Han peoples, who have long been the dominant ethnic group in the area.

This eventually drove them far south to the highlands of China, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand, where the borders between these countries are practically non-existent.

MEET THE AUTHOR

Marcin Ossowski is a native of Merced, California, a town located at the foot of the Sierra Nevada Mountains and home to the newest University of California campus. He finished his undergraduate work at UCLA in 2007 and majored in linguistics and neuroscience, respectively.

EXCERPT FROM THE BOOK

In accordance with Hmong tradition, Lias name was given to her three days after her birth, in a ceremony called *hu plig*, translated as soul-calling. Perhaps more accurately, this is described as the tradition whereby the soul is installed in the newborn child. The Hmong believed that the most common cause of illness was the loss of the soul since humans are bound to *yaaj-yang*, the earthly realm, and can not travel freely to *yeeb-yin*, the spiritual realm.

However, the body is deeply bound to the soul, and both are equally bound to life; this bond of all three was necessary for health and happiness. However, the soul could be, in turn, flighty, skittish or even easily stolen; those who possessed the ability to maintain their unity with the soul were deeply blessed.

Furthermore, the souls of babies were especially prone to disappearance or kidnapping. This was always done at the hands of malevolent spirits known as *dab*, and the guarding of one's spirit and its crucial bond with soul and body was a profound fixture in the Hmong cultural identity...

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CHAPTER OUTLINE

Anne Fadiman's *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*

- + About “The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down”
- + About Anne Fadiman
- + Overall Summary of “The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down”
- + Major Characters
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