

The Library Coven

Episode 40: *Wicked Fox* by Kat Cho

transition [00:00:06] [jaunty string and harpsichord music plays].

jessie [00:00:06] Hello! And welcome to the library coven, a bi weekly podcast in which two bookish besties discuss mostly YA fantasy through the lens of intersectional feminist criticism. Why? Because critique is our fangirl love language, and because talking about books is pretty magical. I'm Jessie.

kelly [00:00:22] And I'm Kelly. And in this episode 40, we are talking about *Wicked Fox* by Kat Cho, an urban fantasy set in Seoul and inspired by Korean folklore. Myong is half gumiho supernatural, nine tailed fox spirit and half human. And she's lost her yeowul gusul, which is a fox bead, which is like kind of the source of her power or her soul slash. If someone else has it, they can control a gumiho. So not good. Myung saves Jihoon from a dokkabi, which is a demon, and then they meet in school and shit goes down.

jessie [00:01:00] Yes [laughs] this episode is out on November 3rd [2021], and you if you haven't already, be sure to cast your ballot today. Your vote matters. Go vote.

kelly [00:01:14] And then make sure you know who your people are so that you can take care of each other no matter what happens.

jessie [00:01:25] [both laugh] Such a downer.

kelly [00:01:26] I'm just being realistic that we have to like we need a plan. Get your people. Um Join the Coven on Discord! we're trying to build some closer, bookish community off of super corporate surveillance social media platforms, so come join us. You can do that by becoming a patron on our Patreon. We changed our support structure. So it's pay what you can one dollar a month or more. And if that is not financially viable, then hit us up and we will give you access anyway. So, yeah.

transition [00:02:05] [spellcasting sound]

jessie [00:02:05] initial reactions. It took me a bit of time to get into this book, but once I did get into it, I really enjoyed it. I liked the characters. It was super cool to see the book take place in South Korea. And the magical system was fascinating. I switched back and forth between the audiobook and the physical book, which was really helpful for pronunciations for me. So, yeah, that was really cool to like get to hear how things are supposed to be said instead of how they sound in my head. [laughs]

kelly [00:02:35] Totally.

jessie [00:02:36] What about you?

kelly [00:02:38] The beautiful cover art and intriguing premise hooked me at the beginning and then the short chapters and well crafted characters slash their relationships, like the tension that was created, the emotional tension is what kept me reading. There's I would say that there's a lot to love about this book and Halmeoni 5 ever!

transition [00:02:54] [jaunty string music plays]

jessie [00:02:58] Time to talk about world building in through the wardrobe. This book takes place in South Korea in our modern time, and it's the first time I've read a book that takes place there. Um, what about you?

kelly [00:03:10] Also firsts for me. First time reading a book that takes place in South Korea in general, I think, and then also, which is like wild to realize. Wow. And then also first time reading. Um, like urban fantasy based on Korean folklore,.

jessie [00:03:31] OK, think you've read urban fantasy before! [kelly laughs].

kelly [00:03:34] oh, i know! But I mean, like specifically based on Korean folklore. So it's like a lot of new in the world building for me, so much so that I realized as I first started the book that like I did not have enough knowledge about Korean culture or politics or geography and language or, I don't know, to like really imagine what was going on in the world effectively, just like realizing my own shortcomings in my education. And so in preparation for recording, alongside writing the novel, I've been watching Itaewon Class, which is a K-drama on Netflix, and I am love, love loving it. I'm just getting started in the genre. But it's like cool to see the some of the conventions and be able to like I know at Namsan Tower looks like and I know that it's like a date spot and the there's this one scene where Jihoon is take is has --- like Miyoung on his back and is like giving her a piggyback ride and carrying her up these steep streets and there is like a scene by scene, exactly the same thing in this K drama earlier on in one of the episodes between some two main characters. And it's like it was just so helpful for me to immerse myself and be able to, like, actually imagine the world by doing some homework. So I'm really happy I did that. And made my reading experience better, honestly. And I found another new show and I'm learning Korean.

jessie [00:05:02] Oh, that's really cool! Yeah, Korean is like a very popular line, I think K Dramas and K Pop are super popular right now. So I do see a lot of people on like on the interwebs, learning Korean and watching shows in Korean and listening to music that's in Korean. So it's very interesting to see how like how that comes about. Um, there's a pretty good episode of Netflix explained about K-pop.

kelly [00:05:28] so Good.

jessie [00:05:28] Although I would like to point out that they did leave out some very important information about cultural appropriation, but it was pretty interesting to learn about, like kind of almost like one direction, like how the bands are kind of like formed by, like these corporate entities sometimes. And that was really interesting because I didn't know that, which is also the case for One Direction. It was like formed by Simon Cowell. So maybe it's just a boyband thing. Like maybe that's just the thing. I don't know. I don't have a lot about the world building because it's in our present time, so they have cell phones and like they're watching TV and like not the things we normally see in books like An Ember and the Ashes [by Sabaa Tahir], but more like L.L. McKinney. So like we get like our normal normal our our present time just with Magic Mnet, which is which is always fun. I think.

kelly [00:06:22] You get some like high school drama.

jessie [00:06:25] Yeah. Yeah. And when we don't have the whole thing, we're like people can't reach each other because like you need like some person to take a letter ten miles

away on foot. [laughs] Like there aren't those like communication errors because like there's no you know, because they have cell phones in this world or whatever.

kelly [00:06:43] Yeah.

jessie [00:06:43] People just aren't answering them. [both laugh]

kelly [00:06:45] They're just not calling or texting each other back. [both laugh] Leaving each other on read.

jessie [00:06:50] Yeah. Yeah. That's not a thing um like on androids, but Ok. [kelly laughs]

transition [00:06:58] [jaunty string music plays].

jessie & kelly [00:06:58] Wands out!

kelly [00:06:59] Let's discuss all things magic.

jessie [00:07:02] So as you mentioned at the beginning of the episode, Miyoung is half gumiho, half human. And that's probably one of the bigger bits of magic because that is a mythical nine tailed fox. And she's kind of like a vampire who devours the energy of men so that she can live forever or gumiho do in general. Although it seems like maybe they can't like they don't like... I don't know that they can really only take men's energy because at the end she takes Halmeoni's to give it to JiHoon. But I thought that was interesting because like what we'll talk about in gender, it was like very like succubus like depicted.

kelly [00:07:40] Yes. Yes, it very much was. Um, that's something that really caught my eye is like how gendered the magical system is from the start. Just. It's like gendered and like the sexuality is also like it's very hetero in a specific way. And it's just like understanding that that is how the magical system is like, how the people are understanding it, the people who are in the story. Right? And then Miyoung is realizing that maybe what she's heard isn't necessarily true. And she can do things with the gi of other people and doesn't necessarily have to devour gi can like siphon it and be like a bridge between it and move it around. So I think that that was also part of the realizing that they like maybe the parameters that we had set on the magical system, like aren't actually parameters or just limitations that we put on ourselves.

jessie [00:08:33] Yeah, like limitations of like your capacity to think outside the box.

kelly [00:08:38] Yeah, exactly.

jessie [00:08:38] Yeah. Yeah. Miyoung has also lost her yeowul Gusul, which is the bead where her soul resides and maybe also the source of her power. I wasn't like one hundred percent sure about that, but. Jihoon, kind of like... I don't know why she lost it, I guess it's something that that shaman did? I was kind of confused about like why it came out of her [both laugh].

kelly [00:09:06] I don't know I don't know why your bead came out, OK? Sounds like a little explicit, but we were not going to get into it. [laughs]

jessie [00:09:13] Yeah, we had a whole discussion before the episode started, and now that's all I can think about. But I don't actually I don't know how to understand, like, why

she lost her bead and then Jihoon touches it [kelly laughs] and then they're like connected in some way.

kelly [00:09:25] [laughing] I'm sorry. I can't. It's so intimate!

jessie [00:09:30] Yeah, yeah, it's yeah, and then, yeah, so anyways, she lost it and she needs to figure out how to put it back [kelly cackles in the background] and the shaman are like kind of like sketchy, like you think that they're helping, But then it turns out like -- they have this like vendetta against Miyoung's Mom For like killing the shaman's family. So it is a lot of drama going on and a lot of moving parts.

transition [00:09:57] [spellcasting sound]

kelly [00:09:59] dokkabi, shamans, gumiho, bujeoks, rituals in the forest on a full moon... There's so much magic in this book, just so rich and expansive, like you said at the beginning.

jessie [00:10:10] Yeah, and I think it's also interesting because I think kind of like what we talked about, like Miyoung kind of realizing that maybe she doesn't only have to siphon the the the souls of men or the energy from men like we learned that, like the dokkabi, you don't always have to be like these ugly, like goblins or whatever, because Jianyu is, like, really hot. [both laugh] So we also see, like the world expanding in the minds of, like our characters, like a shift in their way of thinking about how certain things work or like the myths they believed changing as we read, like as we learn. So we kind of learn about some of it with them, which might have been a way to, like, expose an American audience to like the South Korean mythology.

kelly [00:10:56] Right.

kelly [00:10:56] Sorry to this Korean mythology, which is like kind of a cool way to do that, because, you know, I understand that the author, Kat Cho, has to, like, write for, um, like she wants an American audience. She probably wants, like, all kinds of audiences and knows that, like, Americans might have less experience with Korean folklore. So I really I appreciated that as someone who was not as familiar.

kelly [00:11:21] Absolutely.

transition [00:11:22] [jaunty string music plays].

jessie [00:11:22] Now we're going to talk about conflict villains and good versus evil in our segment, get me Kylo Ren. Detective He? Like, it's always the dads, they're just the worst it's always the absolute worst. Oh, don't trust the dads. [kelly laughs] I mean, maybe you can trust your own dad, but like, don't trust other dads. dads are gross.

kelly [00:11:47] I found Sami Schalk professor, Dr. Sami Schalk put tweeted the like something so relatable. She's like, there are people who have relationships with their parents that are just like productive and generative, and I'm like, that's not what we saw here,.

jessie [00:12:07] No, or in my real life [laughs]

kelly [00:12:11] So did I read the story? Did I read something wrong or did Detective He really try to drown his one year old daughter during the blowout fight with Yena?

jessie [00:12:21] Um You read that exactly correctly.

kelly [00:12:23] That was so shocking to me.

jessie [00:12:26] You know, it's, uh. Yeah, ugh.

kelly [00:12:31] Yeah. Detective. Hey, it's always the dads.

jessie [00:12:34] Yeah, I was also kind of surprised because he seemed like a genuinely nice guy, like coming in and checking up on Jihoon like every day in the hospital and being his personal contact while he's in the hospital, because Jihoon's mom also sucks. Um,.

kelly [00:12:49] Yeah, we'll talk about that later.

jessie [00:12:52] Moms are also the worst. [laughs] So, yeah, I, I was really surprised. I don't know about you. I did not see that one coming.

kelly [00:13:03] It was surprising to me. It also felt a tad bit forced, just like convenient because like this is the only unexplained like I guess I'm also I should have seen it coming. I'm having one of those moments where it's like, yeah, of course, he's the only like other fleshed out adult character. Like, of course it was he was going to be involved in the conflict in some way.

jessie [00:13:25] I didn't think he'd be involved in this way. I thought he was just playing, you know, how sometimes they have, like, those clueless cops and like, um, in fantasy stuff who were like trying to figure things out, but they can't because they don't believe in magic or whatever. I just thought he was going to be one of those.

kelly [00:13:41] But turns out he's a lot more sinister than that and was working with a shaman maybe or started working with them at the end. And, um, it yeah, he really he cares about Jihoon. And I think the point that you said, like, he seemed nice and it's it's just like a reminder that, yeah. Lots of people who do bad shit can seem nice, but we got to like keep in mind, like who are they nice to and why. And like in what contexts. Right? So he's being nice to Jihoon, who's a boy who's full human. So it's like his prejudices against like other beings are coming into it, his baggage with like Yena, you know, his ex partner is coming into it and then he's drawing children into it like just a villain all around. No, thank you.

jessie [00:14:27] Yeah. Yeah. I think people say Ted Bundy was like a really nice guy. So I always watch out for nice people. You can't trust 'em [both laugh].

kelly [00:14:39] We also have some classic revenge trope stuff going on, Shaman Kim wants revenge for her daughter that Yena killed on accident. We find out at the end. So that's another one of those things. Is this like another one of the aspect, I think, of the conflict, like the motors of what generates conflict in this novel is the intergenerational conflict that the younger generation is caught up in uh, like knowingly, but also they come to a like they reach a certain point where there they realize both Nora, who is the shaman friend that is helping Miyoung, but also kind of betrayed Miyoung. But then, like, helps her again. She's also realizing that, like, she doesn't necessarily want to deal with the baggage

the way that her grandmother has been dealing with it. MiYoung has a similar realization. Um, yeah. It's just interesting parallel, I guess.

jessie [00:15:39] Yeah. And I think we actually see this kind of often and like fantasy stories where people kind of take like we see either one of two ways, like people kind of take on those prejudices and like take up the mantle of their parents, kind of like in Star Wars, um, new Star Wars, you know, with like Kylo Ren and stuff.

kelly [00:15:59] It's also happening in my K drama, Itaewon class.

jessie [00:16:04] Oh, see. Or we see people like really push back against like what their parents have been doing, like we kind of see and like, um, like Cassandra Clare novels, like people trying to do like the opposite of like the bad shit their parents did. So I mean, I guess those are the only two options.[both laugh].

kelly [00:16:23] Doesn't it feel like reacting either way, though? I don't know.

jessie [00:16:27] Yeah, I mean, it does kind of, but it makes sense because, like, your parents are so, like, formative to who you are, like, of course, you're reacting to, like, their beliefs and their actions because, like, there's no way to escape them if they're around, you know, and even if they aren't around, you kind of see that with, um, Jihoon, where he wants to be like better than his mom because his mom's not around and he really doesn't like that.

kelly [00:16:50] Right. And even though she's not around, she's still like has an effect, like an impact and a presence on the way he lives his life. So it's just, I guess, something to consider.

jessie [00:16:59] We cannot escape our parents because they literally created us. And so we always are trying to be better than them, I think, or if we like look up to our parents, we're trying to be as good as them. In the case of Kylo Ren trying to be as good as his grandfather, you know? it's a real shit show. Doesn't work out so well.

kelly [00:17:19] Lots of baggage comes along with it.. Lots of trauma.

jessie [00:17:23] Mm hmm.

kelly [00:17:25] Another thing that I thought was a through line in this villain vein is the perception of betrayal, whether it's like real or like lying by omission causes a lot of the causes, other conflicts, too, like yanase, betrayal by her family when they find out who she is or Jihoon, finding out that it's Miyoung, who is responsible for his Halmeoni being in the hospital, even though she also saved his fucking life. Thanks for being grateful.

jessie [00:17:59] I think he preferred that his grandmother had lived than he had lived and like it's survivor's guilt.

kelly [00:18:04] Yeah, classic survivor's guilt, you're right.

jessie [00:18:06] Yeah. Wow are you're coming down real hard on Jihoon. I don't appreciate it.

kelly [00:18:12] [laughs] I'm sorry. I was just giving that as an example. It's not the only example.

jessie [00:18:19] No, I agree.

kelly [00:18:20] And the like the fact that MiYoung is conditioned to expect betrayal from men to, you know, so anyway, I think just like there's a lot there about that.

jessie [00:18:30] Yeah. I mean, it makes sense though, because like both we see it with both Jihoon and Miyong. We're like their parents have let them down in the case of Miyong she thinks it's her dad. But also she's trying to live up to these standards of her mom. In Jihoon it's his mom who has let him down. And I guess his dad also, to an extent we don't really like. We don't meet him, um, but like, they've been let down a lot. So it makes sense that they're always, like, concerned that people don't have their best interests at heart because the people who should have had their best interests at heart don't.

kelly [00:18:59] Damn, You just came through with, like, an incisive analysis. Thanks.

jessie [00:19:02] Thank you. Thank you. [chuckles]

transition [00:19:04] [jaunty string music plays]

kelly [00:19:08] Onward, magical friends, just as one does not simply walk into Mordor, one does not simply read fantasy without talking about representations of race, class, gender and ability. This is our segment about power and bodies and how they relate.

jessie [00:19:23] Let's start with race, as we do,.

kelly [00:19:25] As we do.

jessie [00:19:28] So, all the characters we meet in the story are from South Korea. So we don't really have like a lot of, like, differentiation going on there, at least not that I noticed.

kelly [00:19:39] Right,.

jessie [00:19:40] But we do get, um, I think something like beauty standard things going on. So at one point in the story, there are like these mean girls at the school and Hana asked Miyong, like who did her surgery? So we get a mention of like a double eyelid surgery in the story. So I think, like, we kind of see like like a confronting of like these beauty standards, like outside of US beauty standards. Well, actually, I guess they're very Eurocentric beauty standards is like what we're seeing. So this probably could have gone in like Colonization as well.

kelly [00:20:13] Yeah, for sure.

jessie [00:20:15] But I was interesting to see that and like, um, see these different like social like, it wouldn't have been unusual for someone so young to have had surgery. Um, so I think that's like really talking to, like, Eurocentric beauty standards and how they're opposed on, um, on how they're like put on to other cultures. What I found really interesting, even in like a side mention, but I really like that we got it from like a mean girl, you know.

kelly [00:20:40] Mm hmm. Yeah, just knowing what the sort of like societal expectations are.

jessie [00:20:46] Mm hmm. Yeah, I I'll see if I can try and find it since I'm editing this episode. But there was a podcast I listened to kind of a while ago. It might have been a code switch episode, but just about like surgery in like facial surgery in South Korea.

kelly [00:21:02] Yeah.

jessie [00:21:03] So it could be really interesting to listen to if I can find it.

kelly [00:21:06] Totally. This actually comes up with one of the women protagonist in the K-drama I'm watching to see, you know, is just trying to say trying to get away with having a fake ID. And she's like, I got it before I got my nose filled in.

jessie [00:21:19] Oh,.

kelly [00:21:19] And so just like but knowing that that's like a cultural touchstone.

jessie [00:21:22] Yeah.

kelly [00:21:23] Um, yeah. I'll definitely if you find that I'm definitely gonna check it out.

jessie [00:21:27] Yeah. But also interesting because like I don't know that we should Nessa's like I don't know that we should necessarily like give people shit for getting surgery if that's something they want to do,.

kelly [00:21:36] No, Which I don't think we're doing.

jessie [00:21:38] No, no. I'm just saying like it shouldn't feel like you have to to fit some, you know, beauty standard or whatever. But like I know Kaley Cuoco from Big Bang Theory, she got like her boobs done and she, like people give her shit for. But she's like, I'm really glad I did it. Like, I feel better about how I look. And I'm just like, if that's what you want to do, you should also just like be allowed to do that without people, like being shitty about it.

kelly [00:22:02] Yeah. Yeah.

transition [00:22:03] [spellcasting sound]

jessie [00:22:06] Ready to talk about class?

kelly [00:22:07] I am, indeed.

jessie [00:22:09] Um, we really see a class distinction between JiHoon and Miyung and then Jihoon and his mom, so like Jihoon is not wealthy. He- his grandmother does own a restaurant, which is like. I mean, I don't like I don't know how.

kelly [00:22:25] so like like working class, I guess?

jessie [00:22:27] –and I don't know how, like the economic system works in South Korea. So maybe something I'll look into and put in the show notes. Um, but like when he was at Miyoung's or maybe at his mom's house, he talks about, like, how his whole apartment would fit in, like their living room or whatever. Um, so we we always seemed like these class distinctions with JiHoon and like his mom is like trying to give him her, like new husbands, old coat or whatever. And he's like, no, thank you. Like I don't want you're like garbage, you know?

kelly [00:22:54] Right.

jessie [00:22:55] Um, so we see a lot of class coming in like in that sense mostly centered around Jihoon and like his friend Che Wong is like really rich, like his he has a driver come picking him up from school and that sort of stuff.

kelly [00:23:10] Yeah, in that same along that same line, the. About a little more than halfway through the book, we after Halmeoni spends days in a coma in the hospital, so Meehan comes in with some truth and is saying it's talking about how the landlord is trying to pull shit and kick Joon out while his helmet is in the hospital. So we have some, like, predatory landlord dynamics again. Fuck that. I mean, we're still obviously in the capitalist system. That's the context. And I like how you pointed out this disparity and the like big dichotomy between Jihoon and Miyoung and then also Jihoon and his mom, because there's a passage on page 31 that I'd like to read to you and get your take on, because I'm not quite sure if wealth inequity is being romanticized in this moment. And it just like seems to go with this other things that we're talking about. So Jihoon's basically taking in a landscape at the base of Namsan Tower. "Walking to the fence, Ji Hoon had to admit the view was stellar as the sun approached the horizon, it gave the city a glow. He could see the patterns of Seoul from up here, where the old tile roofs of the haddock's merged with the newer metal and concrete of the city. Such a contrasting mess to see the old homes that boasted underfloor coal heating and rice paper walls next to the most modern of skyscrapers. But in this city, the dichotomy worked. In the city, the dichotomy thrived. It seemed that sometimes opposites did find a balance."

jessie [00:24:34] Yeah, I think that could be taken like either way, like I think that could be read two ways and one, I think it could be looking at like the wealth disparities. But it kind of depends on like what Jihoon means by, like, the dichotomy there? Because maybe what he like when I read that, I read it as like the old and the new as a like the like rich and the poor. But it kind of also depends, like, is it like. It kind of depends like on like if that is a signal of, like wealth disparity, but I read it as like the old city, like the houses that had been there before, like the skyscrapers and that sort of thing. And then like the new like flashy fancy skyscrapers or whatever.

kelly [00:25:18] OK.

jessie [00:25:18] But so I don't know if it's like an architectural thing or if it's like a wealth thing.

kelly [00:25:25] Yeah, I think. Yeah. Thank you for your for your insight, your take.

jessie [00:25:31] There is a show I watch and I'll have to remember that. I think it's called like fabulous houses or something, but they were in, I think, in Japan and they had like very like traditional Japanese houses and stuff like that, they went to see, like in a farming village or a fishing village. And I had to find the episode because it was really cool,

because I think the architecture is so different than like what we're used to in like the United States, um, which is like very Eurocentric. Um, yeah. Have to find that episode because it was really cool to see, like, how the different parts of the house moved like walls and stuff and like how the windows were different. So obviously Japan is not Korea, but, um, but it does share some similar architecture.

kelly [00:26:17] Yeah. And it mentions the rice paper walls. And thank you for pointing that out because it's like I think I was conflating, you know, old with poor, which isn't necessarily true. Right. Like some of the building materials, just because they're not concrete and glass doesn't mean that they're like low quality, you know. So thank you.

jessie [00:26:34] You're welcome. [laughs] Um, but I also see what you mean. Like, I think we see that sometimes in like in that same show, they were talking about houses in England and how, like, some of them still have like thatched roofs.

kelly [00:26:47] whoa.

jessie [00:26:47] and to me that seems like why would you do that? Like like it also seems like maybe like because you can't afford, like, a different type of roofing or whatever. But I also think it's like a way to preserve history.

kelly [00:26:58] Totally.

jessie [00:26:59] And like, it can be very efficient. It's also like super expensive to keep up because you actually have to replace that a lot.

kelly [00:27:06] Yeah.

jessie [00:27:06] So like having those old things also could be a sign of wealth.

kelly [00:27:09] Mhm. Yes. Thank you. Uh, that's I love talking to you. [laughs] I learn so much.

transition [00:27:16] [spellcasting sound]

kelly [00:27:18] Wanna talk about gender a little bit more?

jessie [00:27:19] Yeah. So I think we've mentioned this a couple of times now that the gumiho are only women or at least that's what we've seen so far. I'm kind of wondering if that might like as we see the mythology change, that might also change. And they are seen as enchanting and like overtly sexual and like their sexual and---- we see them like I think they're portrayed as sexual, but like I think they're actually being sexualized.

kelly [00:27:46] Right.

jessie [00:27:47] And we see that, like with Miyoung and like gross dudes, like bothering her and stuff. And I was just like, no, thank you.

kelly [00:27:57] Which I think there's also a lot to say. And I'm not very knowledgeable about the subject, but about like the sexualization of teenage like girls with Asian features.

jessie [00:28:08] Mmhhmm.

kelly [00:28:11] Yeah, I don't I don't know. It does seem to be like a. And it seems like this is playing around with both of those, right, because there's the Khadra, there's the Gumiho folklore aspect, right? Which is the succubus essentially that you mentioned earlier. Also like a mermaid, you know, this like Sirene, fatalistic female character that like lures men and then thus needs the like, needs to kill to survive. I wasn't really feeling MiYoung's like guilt about needing to kill bad predatory dudes, but like, whatever. I knew, like, I get that it has to be there narrative for the character development and stuff like that. Just like I don't know if I would feel that way. [laughs]

jessie [00:28:58] I would not.

kelly [00:28:59] Well, we all know that [both laugh].

jessie [00:29:03] OK.

kelly [00:29:06] Um, just saying I'm just saying it like it is.

jessie [00:29:10] You are 100 percent right. Yeah, go on.

kelly [00:29:15] I don't really know what else I was saying, just that there's like and also with, like, the K drama, high school like esthetic that trope, you know, so it's like they're both in high school, you know, it's like and then she's quite literally like a sexualized Fox demon woman.

jessie [00:29:33] Yeah, yeah, yeah. Like the school aspect like esthetic feeds into that because like,.

kelly [00:29:40] Yes.

jessie [00:29:41] I do think, like she's wearing a uniform,.

kelly [00:29:44] Right? Yes! Thank you!

jessie [00:29:46] And I don't think that is specific to like Asian women, although I do think we see it a lot with that. But I think, like, you see it in, like, pornography and stuff like a lot of I like and they are obviously not children, but like Miyoung is a child. So like to see her sexualized is not good.

kelly [00:30:04] Yeah, it's upsetting.

jessie [00:30:05] Yeah. But I do think we see that like school girl or Catholic school.

kelly [00:30:09] Yes. Yes.

jessie [00:30:09] That would be the American version of that.

kelly [00:30:12] Right. Totally.

jessie [00:30:13] Where they're like very sexualized and I don't know what that is about and I'm not really sure I want to know. I don't want to be able to understand, but it's

probably something about being youthful and young and men are gross. So they are like into it. [laughs] And there's my hot take.

kelly [00:30:36] I don't know if I'm going to go like full kink shaming in my answer.

jessie [00:30:43] I'm just saying it's children.

kelly [00:30:44] Yeah. Yeah.

jessie [00:30:45] I will shame that. So.

kelly [00:30:47] Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

jessie [00:30:49] No, no regrets. Yeah, but the sexualization of children is just like not OK, and I think we kind of see, like, Miyoung dealing with this and, um. Yeah, yeah.

kelly [00:31:05] There's a whole host—

jessie [00:31:07] Go ahead.

kelly [00:31:07] I was going to say there's a pretty relevant conversation happening with Netflix, a film on Netflix called Cuties talking about the sexualization of Black girls in France.

jessie [00:31:20] Mm hmm.

kelly [00:31:21] So I haven't seen the film, but we can we'll include some info about it and and some of the like the whole controversy that's going on. So.

transition [00:31:30] [spellcasting sound]

jessie [00:31:32] Are you ready to talk ability, bodyminds, et cetera?

kelly [00:31:35] Let's do it. Losing her Yeowul Gusul causes chronic bodymind issues for Miyoung. She's cold, she's hungry and fatigued all the time. Um, anything else?

jessie [00:31:51] And she sees ghosts now.

kelly [00:31:53] Oh, yeah! That's true. [laughs] That's a fun that's a fun twist,.

jessie [00:31:57] Which we learn is like maybe like the crux of her problem in the beginning. Maybe like Had caused some like mental health issues, like as a young child, is that she weirdly could see these ghost, but like her mom can't so, like maybe this is— ooh I don't know how I feel about this now that I'm saying it out loud, but like maybe a burden of her being like two different things or like mix just things I don't know how I feel about that.

kelly [00:32:26] Yeah, to me, more seems like a a function of that, like parental gaslighting, like we saw with Malik in episode thirty nine.

jessie [00:32:35] Mm hmm.

kelly [00:32:36] From a song of Wraiths and Ruin [by Roseanne A. Brown]. Not wings and ruin.

jessie [00:32:42] The song of Wraith's and ruin.

kelly [00:32:45] ACOWAR either way, asowar not acowar. God damn it. Anyway. That's not what we're talking about but so yeah that the we see like chronic illness and pain being dealt with and then also having on the other side having the yeowul gusul has severe repercussions for Jihoon's body mind. He has seizures and it seems like fainting spells and he's in and out of the hospital. And at one point the doctors like we don't know what's going on, should we consider surgery? And I was like, are you fucking kidding? No! No. But anyway, I just I appreciated how that this was treated with a lot of detail.

jessie [00:33:29] Yeah. And migraines. That's the other thing that Jihoon has going on.

kelly [00:33:33] That's right. That's right.

jessie [00:33:34] Although I guess the surgery could make sense in the fact that I think surgery is often can be very helpful for people with really bad seizures.

kelly [00:33:42] Mm hmm. But when they don't know what's going on...

jessie [00:33:45] Yeah, I don't actually think they often know what's going on with seizures.

kelly [00:33:50] That's true. That's a good point. It is called practicing medicine, after all.

jessie [00:33:54] Yeah, practicing, um, it's hard. Bodies are hard.

kelly [00:34:00] They really are.

jessie [00:34:00] As we know. Um, yeah, but he is like in and out of the hospital. And we also see this I guess this could have gone in class like his bills, like kind of piling up because of it. I don't know what the health system is like in South Korea. So another thing to put into the show notes. Um, I don't yeah. I just don't know how that works um, money wise.

kelly [00:34:23] Neither do I.

jessie [00:34:24] It sounds like maybe similar to us where, like, you got to pay for that shit and that's expensive.

kelly [00:34:32] On page 416, there's the scene-- that's so that's like three pages before the end. There's a scene with Miyung and Samine where the latter is asking questions about what it's like to be a gumiho. And I just love this quote. And it really stuck with me. It says, "Oddly enough, Miyung like Samine's blunt curiosity. In a way, it made her think of her gumiho state differently, not as a monster, but as another being trying to figure out how to exist in the world." I just thought that was a good way of encapsulating, you know, how we maybe monster-ize, I just made a verb. certain things that make us different and it's just different.

jessie [00:35:13] Yeah, well, and it kind of like kind of looks that like people can be scared to ask questions sometimes, which I think is what–

kelly [00:35:21] Yeah.

jessie [00:35:21] –MiYoung has like experienced in the past. And like just Somine being like, what is this like? It's kind of validating to be like, wow, I'm different. But that doesn't make me any less of a of a person, you know?

kelly [00:35:33] Yeah.

jessie [00:35:34] And sometimes people just appreciate being asked straight up, like, what does this mean for you?

kelly [00:35:40] Right. And then and Somine actually like asking from a place of curiosity and just wanting to understand, not wanting to judge or not like wanting to fix or not. So these are some of those like listening filters that we can sometimes have on. And I will put them-- I'll send some info for the show notes.

jessie [00:35:57] Perfect.

kelly [00:35:58] And Miyong, like, quote unquote, loses her abilities, her supernatural strength and speed and smell and abilities and his full human at the end. At least that's what we're led to believe. And then there's a cliffhanger. So who knows what's going on.

jessie [00:36:13] Wait There was a cliffhanger?

kelly [00:36:14] Wasn't there? Like she had some, like, scary dream, and so maybe she's not safe and her bid is something's happening to it. That was abrupt at the end. And I don't really I don't know,.

jessie [00:36:25] There is another book, so.... [both laugh]

kelly [00:36:27] So there's going to be a cliffhanger because other things are happening in the next book.

jessie [00:36:32] Yeah, I don't even remember what the next book is called. Let me just look it up real fast so it can be in the show. The next book is called Vicious Spirits. I actually didn't think about this like is is is Jihoon going to go live with his mom now?

kelly [00:36:47] Oh, I don't know. Yeah, they did kind of have like a moment there at the end.

jessie [00:36:52] Yeah, well, and I'm also wondering because, like, his Halmeoni, Halmeoni is dead and like, where will he live now? You know? Maybe he'll take over the restaurant, that would be cool and I would love to see that.

kelly [00:37:04] And then this is going to be even more like a Itaewon Class, because the main character is like all about owning his own restaurant and avenging his father. Anyway, I could go on and on and on.

jessie [00:37:14] Oh, my gosh. So funny. And I think the next book is already out.

kelly [00:37:20] Oh!

jessie [00:37:20] Oh, yeah, it just came out in August [2020], so.

kelly [00:37:24] Oh, nice!

jessie [00:37:24] Yay! Viscious Spirits-- out now, wherever you get your books.

transition [00:37:29] [jaunty string music plays]

jessie [00:37:34] Finally, it's time for Shipwrecked, a segment about asexuality, sexuality, sex, romance and relationships, and sometimes we take liberties and do some shopping of our own. OK, what are your thoughts about the Jihoon Miyung ship? I like it, OK, but I also kind of want MiYoung to explore all her options because Jihoon is like the first dude that's ever been, like, really nice to her. And she didn't feel like she needed to murder him. So.

kelly [00:38:00] Agreed on both points. I think so-- Somin's cool. And that that might be an option. And also Miyoung is. Yeah. The first person to literally show interest and not be like running away from her. It's like you don't necessarily have to go with that option.

jessie [00:38:20] Yeah. Yeah.

kelly [00:38:21] But I thought that I, I liked how the romantic tension was crafted. I thought the that was really good. And that's another one of these things that I'm writing about, like the K drama genre is that it's a lot about like this pining and the small, uh. Like, I don't know, they can just, like, charge so much emotional content into this, like, pining scene. It's incredible. Like so I was noticing that happening. Like, I could I could sense that, like there's Um that it's like taking a getting inspired by that by that genre. And I thought that the scenes between them were cute and like super innocent and sweet and, uh, except for the whole, like, killing his grandma part on accident,.

jessie [00:39:17] Although, I mean, he was I mean, she was trying to save his life, so. I think I kind of just want them to be friends, maybe.

kelly [00:39:24] Mm hmm.

jessie [00:39:25] I like their friendship, like, wow, they're getting to know each other, I think, better than them being, like, together. So I don't know.

kelly [00:39:33] Fair.

jessie [00:39:34] What about about Che Wong-- and in Che Wong and Janoo, John Yoo, Jun Yoo? It's hard because I'm like listening to it. I'm like trying to re pronounce them, but it's like unfamiliar to me. So I'm like, am I saying this right? You know?

kelly [00:39:50] Yeah. Yeah.

jessie [00:39:51] I kind of have like a feeling about the two of them, but I'm also like, I don't know, maybe they just friends, you know, and I'm like reading too much into it.

kelly [00:40:02] The tandem bike scene. See, there's so much emotional content in that one scene. You see what I mean?

jessie [00:40:06] Oh my god oh my god Well, it's hard because Che Wong is like really like he seems like so enamored with Junyu, you like with his car and like his fancy stuff. And they're both like rich fancy boys. So I'm like, you all should be together.

kelly [00:40:20] Yeah. You deserve each other. Have fun!

jessie [00:40:22] Yeah. Yeah. Um, so I'm kind of like want them to be together. I don't know.

kelly [00:40:28] I'm tentatively on the ship. I like it.

jessie [00:40:31] OK, ok.

kelly [00:40:33] Halmeoni And Jihoon and just like. All the heart emojis. I really love grandparent, grandchild, relationship in books and irl, I think they're just very special.

transition [00:40:46] [jaunty string music plays].

kelly [00:40:46] Now we're going to talk about writing style, narration, characterization, plot structure, and basically whatever else comes to mind in a segment called Kill Your Darlings.

jessie [00:40:55] I think I say this every time we read something that's in third person, but it always takes me longer to get into the story. I think I just prefer first person. But like when I started reading this, I was just like, oh, no. [kelly laughs] And I don't think it takes me a minute to realize that the fact that I feel that way is because, like, third person sounds so stilted to me now because I read so much in first person, not just Y.A. books, but like other books as well. Um, then I'm always just like, oh, why are you doing this to me? It feels wrong. [both laugh] So I'm just like never prepared for a third person especially YA novel. I'm just like, why? [laughs].

kelly [00:41:37] Yeah. It seemed like it was a little bit of a like trying to bridge the gap between first person novels and third person but like vocalized on different characters in different chapters.

jessie [00:41:50] Mm hmm.

kelly [00:41:52] So it's a little bit harder, I think, as a reader, to, like understand how the narrator has access to all of that. It's like a quasi omniscient narrator rather than like this is coming from my mind and it's being narrated from my perspective. It's like a third person focalization on the inside.

jessie [00:42:10] Yeah. And I'm not actually sure I don't think that each chapter, like, headed it up with, like, who's chapter we were going to be in, which always made me, you know, like I could obviously tell with no problem, um, both with the audio book and with the physical book. But I always am just like, wait, who is this? You know, like for a second I'm just like it just takes me longer to get into it, I think because you're just like not in the mind of the character.

kelly [00:42:36] Yeah.

jessie [00:42:36] The same way.

kelly [00:42:37] So the chapters are numbered and then almost every single one, almost every single chapter begins with either Miyoung or Jihoon's name. So like that kind of signposting.

jessie [00:42:50] Mm hmm.

kelly [00:42:51] And then there's Miyung and Jihoon some of these, so it's just a different way to do it. But yeah, you have your preferences.

jessie [00:42:58] But I'll be ready for the next book now because I know and now that I say it, I don't actually know if Crooked Kingdom is like is that first person? I can't remember, but that's like such a huge cast characters. I think it's first person.

kelly [00:43:13] I think it's just a bunch of different and I think it might be third person with a bunch of different like third person interior focalizations with literary nerds would call it, but whatever.

jessie [00:43:23] Mm hmm.

kelly [00:43:24] I found the folklore interludes immersive. You know, there's like kind of a paratext. They're distinguished by form, which I thought was like helpful as a reader, you know, that they're in italics. They're the gray pages with the moon illustration. And similar to dreams it's like a great narrative tactic to give the audience some more information outside of the quote unquote, bounds of straightforward sequential plot narration. So I like these sorts of things. Yeah. Like dream sequence or something.

jessie [00:43:51] I would say I liked it when I was reading the physical book and the audio book. It wasn't distinguished very well.

kelly [00:43:57] Mmmm. That would be hard.

jessie [00:43:58] Yeah, because there wasn't like a change in the narrator's voice or like there was nothing to like distinguish—.

kelly [00:44:05] or like a Musical background? Maybe you could do like a low grade song behind it or something.

jessie [00:44:11] Yeah. So when I was this because I had, I had started with the physical book and I was like going back and forth, I had seen those in the in the physical book. So that was helpful. But like when I switched the audio book, like if I hadn't started with the physical book, I think that would have been like very jarring because there's nothing to signal that that's happening and it just kind of starts at the end of another chapter. And because it's like there's no chapter numbers for those either or anything. So it's like it was very confusing for the audio book. So I wish that had been done differently for that medium.

kelly [00:44:44] I love that you make this point because it's making me think about like, oh, what are the different ways that you could, like, really enhance audio book storytelling?

jessie [00:44:52] Mm hmm. Um, and like me personally, I don't really like music to be in the audio book or any of the like other additions, additions to it, like a series of unfortunate events, for example, has like they're at the beach, so you can hear waves and seagulls and stuff. And I find that kind of thing to be kind of distracting. But maybe if there was something like to head up these chapters, like even like a new chapter number or something since it comes at the end of another chapter, it's like just very confusing.

kelly [00:45:21] Yeah. They're just really I think we just like. There's audio drama and audio fiction are doing so many cool things and the podcast world at the moment that it just I don't know, it seems like there's so much possibility there, I guess, to actually mess around with the audio book form.

jessie [00:45:37] Mm hmm. And, of course, I don't think this is like. Obviously, this is no fault of the authors, like when I think probably for the most part, when you're writing a book, you're thinking of like the written word. So you're not really thinking about, like, how this translate to an audio book. And you might not even think about the fact that your books might be made into an audio book because, like, not all of them are.

kelly [00:45:55] Right.

jessie [00:45:56] So I could see I just think, like whoever made the audio book might need to have thought of a way to introduce this, like kind of like a paratext.

transition [00:46:05] [spellcasting sound]

kelly [00:46:08] I have a smells like YA moment.

jessie [00:46:10] OK.

kelly [00:46:12] "He smells of salt and rain with just a hint of something smoothed beneath the scent of his skin. Sweet like cream. It made her hard for her to think" on page 156. [laughs] but it's raining in the seed, so the rain actually makes some fucking sense.

jessie [00:46:26] Yeah, and I'm guessing the saltiness was like sweaty, I'm also like, ew. [laughs].

kelly [00:46:32] Cream? Cream? I don't know. I just I'm enjoying picking these out. I think they're silly.

jessie [00:46:37] Yeah. At least it was raining in this one.

kelly [00:46:39] Yes, it makes sense. It was raining. It's not just like Jihoon's rain hair product.

jessie [00:46:44] Yeah.

kelly [00:46:45] Also, I appreciate the glossary. Thanks.

jessie [00:46:48] Was there glossary at the end?

kelly [00:46:49] Yeah, a very, very thorough glossary. It tells you all about different, like the different like dishes that are mentioned, food, dishes, regions of Seoul, uh, like it talks about how Namsan Tower is a popular date place. Like it gives like actual really helpful information in the glossary.

jessie [00:47:12] I'll have to go back and look at it. I think I finished the book on audio, so I don't remember if that is there or not. I remember a few authors note, like a few things at the end, but not a lot, so maybe.

kelly [00:47:22] It gives the Korean characters for things. Um, it talks like gives talks, says what soju is like if you don't know it's soju was it's like literally everywhere, rice alcohol. and then "seonbae", it's got "eomma". "halmeoni" means grandmother, but it's also like a term of respect for an older woman.

jessie [00:47:44] Mm hmm.

kelly [00:47:44] And so I just I love I'm also a little bit like not a little bit really into it with the K drama situation right now. So. I'm enjoying learning Korean.

transition [00:47:55] [jaunty string music plays]

kelly [00:47:59] Recommend, if you like...

jessie [00:48:00] I can't think of any direct books that I think would make good parallels, but I think I think you would like this book if you enjoy strong female characters and non Western mythology. I really enjoy that aspect of the book just because it's something we haven't read a lot of. I'm like very hesitant to just be like here, read these other books by other Asian authors that are Asian inspired. [laughs] So,.

kelly [00:48:25] Yeah, I didn't want to do that either.

jessie [00:48:27] Especially because I feel like they were like the it's not similar to like the other ones we read.

kelly [00:48:31] No it's not similar to Girls of Paper and Fire (by Natasha Ngan) at all.

jessie [00:48:34] Or Spin the Dawn [by Elizabeth Lim] on or like any of those. So it's just like very different than what I like. I didn't come in with any expectations I like, but I think if you like urban fantasy and if you like mythology just in general, because I think if you like mythology, I think we mostly think of like Greek and Roman mythology. But it's cool to, like, expand your knowledge of different kinds of mythology. So then I think you would like like people would enjoy this.

kelly [00:48:57] Yeah, totally. I, I kind of was going my recommendations come along the like urban fantasy with cool magical systems vein. Like if you like Brooklyn Brujas [by Zoraida Córdova] or if you like Nightmareverse [by L.L. McKinney], I think you'd like this story. [jaunty string music plays].

kelly [00:49:13] Before we end, it's time for real talk. Did reading this book make your perspective change in any way, or did it make you interrogate a concept or system or trend or something, another that you hadn't before?

jessie [00:49:23] On page 94, Hal- Halmeoni says of the Gumiho, "when you're constantly treated as a pariah and labeled bad, you might begin living up to that expectation." And while this doesn't look very far off from, I think, things I have thought of in the past or things I've read in the past, I really just appreciated that, um, sentiment where, you know? Uh and I think we see this with Miyoung where she thinks she has to do specific things a specific way because that's what her mom taught her, because her mom has these feelings about Gumiho, because of the way she was treated. So I really just appreciated this, that, like, sometimes people's expectations of you can kind of inform the way you behave and in specific situations or just in your life in general. And I think that's probably especially true when those things are coming from your parents, because Miyoung is like she's still a kid. Um, so I just really appreciated this. Um, Halmeoni is very wise.

kelly [00:50:23] Yeah. What you're describing is reminding me of stereotype threat.

jessie [00:50:26] Mmmhmm.

kelly [00:50:26] When you say you're gonna-- that girls are bad at STEM, and then they you know, I internalize that for whatever reason because my authority figures have been saying this and then I do worse on science tests or whatever. For example.

jessie [00:50:40] What about you?

kelly [00:50:42] I have two things to bring to the section. The first I want to talk about is apologies. So there's a scene on page 332 that is kind of making me consider that there are I'm sure not probably like there most definitely are cultural differences in the way we apologize and the way forgiveness works. Um, and I'm not sure if that's what's going on in the scene, but at the same time, Jihoon apologizes, it seems like, out of his own feelings because, quote, I'll never feel right about it if he doesn't get to apologize. And then Miyoung in the same exchange is rapidly accepts the apology in the hopes that, like, she'll get left alone. So it's just like being attentive to this dynamic about like why we're apologizing and who is it for? I guess so. Like, I don't I don't feel. Like, confident enough to say that, like this apology and like Meh, I don't know what's going on here, but it's like at the same time there is something to consider, you know, like why we're apologizing and who who like it's benefiting and like who like are you trying to rush to repair to fix your own feelings that you don't want to like, feel that because they're quote unquote negative or are we like doing it because we're actually seeking repair and accountability.

jessie [00:51:56] Yeah.

kelly [00:51:58] The other thing I have is, oh, my gosh, this was getting to me throughout the entire book. Parents aren't necessarily hiding things from their kids who are like quasi like young adults. You know, preteens are older under the guise of, quote unquote, protecting them. And I was just like, can you all just rethink that, please? All of you characters, parent characters out there, infantilizing isn't cool. And I just think that there's like a way to explain yourselves that is age appropriate. You know?

jessie [00:52:29] I think parents maybe worry about, like so many things affecting their kids, like mentally. And the I don't know, this is why I won't have kids, I don't ever have to figure this out, so.

kelly [00:52:40] Neither of us are parents. Lainey's very well adjusted.

jessie [00:52:44] Yeah, well, I did read all the books on.

kelly [00:52:48] Cat parenting.

jessie [00:52:49] Cat parenting 101. Read the books. [laughs]

transition [00:52:57] [Jaunty string music plays].

jessie [00:52:57] Thanks for listening to the library cover, and we'll be back in two weeks for discussion of Nocturna by Maya Motayne. As always, we'd love to be in conversation with you magical folks. Let us know what you think of the episode. Anything we missed or just say hi by dropping a line in the comments or by reaching out to us on Twitter or Instagram at the library cubin. You can post or tweet about the show using the hashtag critically reading and theLibrary Coven. And you can contact us via email at the library coven at Gmail dot com.

kelly [00:53:24] You can subscribe to The Library Coven on the podcast app of your choice wherever you get your podcasts. And we'd really appreciate it if you would write and review the show on Apple podcast, because for some reason that platform's ratings matter. And also, if you could spread the word to some other rad people out there who you think would enjoy it. If you're able to support our labor financially, you can make a one time donation to us on Ko-fi. You can support us monthly on Patreon in exchange for bonus apps, um, access to the Discord, mini-sodes and more things. And now you can support the show by shopping at our bookshop dog affiliate page. Until next time. Stay Magical.

kelly [00:54:04] Kelly is recording on Cheyenne, Ute, and Arapaho Land. Jessie is recording on Peoria, Kaskaskia, Peankasha, Wea, Miami, Mascoutin, Odawa, Sauk, Mesquaki, Kickapoo, Pottawatomie, Ojibwe and Chickasaw Land.