

Dear Reader,

The class I failed in high school was geometry. An older girl from church helped me try to pass it, but I still had to make it up the summer after. I was never good at math, and always had the tendency to dissolve under pressure. I grew up in the competition of capitalism not at the back, but already behind—depressed, anxious, suicidal, shoving down emotions to perform normalcy for adults, like many children and teenagers do.

In 2007-2008, DC Comics attempted to create an imprint called "Minx," to publish graphic novels aimed towards teenage girls, inspired by the rising popularity of manga in the U.S. The genre of Shoujo manga, with its emotional journey and relationship-focused narratives, has existed for nearly a century in Japan, in its name stating its purpose: "Girls' Comics." What did Minx do that Shoujo had also done many decades prior? Start off with hiring middle-aged men to write and illustrate most of these stories. Minx only existed a year, but that was long enough for me to read their books at the library as a preteen and wonder why this was the first time I was seeing a Korean-American girl as a protagonist in a comic, and why she seemed cool but fell a little flat to me. As an adult, I discover, perhaps it's because none of the people working on it had ever been a Korean-American girl.

In 2018 *Litro Magazine* essay published online called "How To Write Queer Korean Lit," translator and writer Anton Hur elaborates on his thoughts about the history of Korean literature, as well as the queerness that has always existed in it. One of my favorite points about the fragmentation of self and narrative ends with this quote: "Gender identity isn't like Pantone swatches, it's really like the Frankenstein monster. It's stitched together. You can't describe it in one word or ten, sometimes you need an entire novel. And that's what a lot of queer lit is, actually, not just in Korea but everywhere: a stitching together of a self from disparate fragments of language."

For me, a diasporic queer Korean who relied on borrowed comics for a sense of self, whose memories are fragmented by trauma that is not only from my parents, but the Korean War that made refugees of their parents, that as a teenage girl estranged from their own history, could not imagine a future sometimes. How is it that I could have friends and crushes, but feel friendless and sexless? How could I admire and be attracted to someone, whatever their gender, but also jealous that I couldn't be as bright as them? How could I be ungrateful when I had the glorious American middle-class lifestyle, only to become destined to a life of debt? Why can I have love now as a disabled, transgender adult with a real community, sharing it so freely, so effortlessly with everyone but my own mother? Why do I still sometimes feel unworthy of love?

There might be an answer in this book, but mostly it's just a reason to say that I exist, the people I love exist, that I could make a Shoujo manga for people like me.

Sincerely,  
Sunmi

P.S. My birth name is Sunmi, yes, it's a coincidence with K-pop star Sunmi.