

Dear Reader:

Growing up in Korea, my favorite TV show was called *The Hometown of Folklore* (전설의 고향), which told traditional Korean ghost stories. The scariest ghosts in this show were the virgin female ghosts. They were sweet, subservient girls until their terrible, untimely deaths that turned them into vicious spirits. The only way to release them from the spirit world was to acknowledge the crime that had been done to them and make the proper amends. I encountered Gumiho for the first time in this show. She made a deep impression on me because she was so different from other female characters in most Korean folktales. Not only was she beautiful—she was also mysterious, powerful, and cunning. I wondered how she became that way and why she would want to be a mere human when she had all that magical power. I thought, if I were her, I'd rather stay as Gumiho and use my power to rule the world!

When I first conceived of this graphic novel about Gumiho, I thought it would be a fun, action-packed fantastical thriller full of cool scenes for me to draw. Now I realize what I've actually made is a book about generational trauma.

This story is set 400 years ago, and our society has changed a lot since then. Women's lives have gotten better for sure, but we have a way to go before we reach gender equality. Women are often not believed when they report sexual violence. Mothers are expected to give up their careers to care for their children, unlike fathers. In many countries women are forbidden to be educated and their choices are denied.

Korean women, especially the women of older generations, live with the heavy burden of generational trauma caused by the patriarchy and war. So much of the success of modern Korea was built on the backs of these women who sacrificed their entire lives for their country. They did it because they loved their families and because society told them they had to do it. They

were told that their own desires mattered less than the desires of their parents, brothers, husbands, and sons. The women who didn't or couldn't hold their tongues were ostracized and even killed. Some women aren't even aware of the damage they've suffered by living in such an oppressive society.

Koreans call the unsatiated longing for a life fully lived and the need to correct the wrongs done to them, han (한). I've thought about why so many Korean American women authors want to write about han. I think it is because we can see what it has done to the most important Korean women in our lives, our mothers. We want the world to understand our han as much as we want to understand it.

Although han is a Korean word, I don't think this sentiment is exclusive to Koreans or to women. I believe it is universal, and everyone who has been systemically exploited holds it in their hearts. This book is for them.

Robin Ha