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Nora Okja Keller

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Nora Okja Keller, the acclaimed author of **Comfort Woman**, tells the shocking story of a group of young people abandoned after the Korean War. At the center of the tale are two teenage girls—Hyun Jin and Sookie, a teenage prostitute kept by an American soldier—who form a makeshift family with Lobetto, a lost boy who scrapes together a living running errands and pimping for neighborhood girls. Both horrifying and moving, **Fox Girl** at once reveals another layer of war's human detritus and the fierce love between a mother and daughter.

Fox Girl Details

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Author : Nora Okja Keller

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From Reader Review Fox Girl for online ebook

oana says

3.5

Cristina says

A breathtaking and brutally human tale about the image and place of Korean women in the post-war "America Town" Korea.

Historical novels about the struggles of humans, either make me want to puke convulsively or punch every person I see on the street. I'm too naive to realize what it's like to live under a war, to see your reality change in a second, turning the most basic human rights into nothing, 'till you forget you're a person that deserves to live and not just survive.

The atrocities that people testified never fail to leave me horrified and scared, because I know I'm reading this in the past tense but shit like this won't ever extinguish, just like ill-minded people won't ever stop making them happen..

This was not a review but a lament, I guess.

Ming says

This book has some beautiful writing. The story is one depressing reading experience. Absolutely a downer.

Professor Elaine Kim asserted that the first significant waves of Korean immigrants to the U.S. were able to immigrate because of their connections (often, in marriages) to members of the U.S. military. Given this story and what these women had to do to "avail" themselves to U.S. soldiers (and to possibly become wives), I'm all the more depressed.

Two quotes:

"In a way, Sookie did move in with us. Something like her shadow breathed through the empty spaces of our home. Her presence was felt in the absence of small foodstuffs, in the secrets and suspicions left unsaid, in the guilt that caused my father to boil eggs two at a time."

"And then it was as if those long-limbed vines in the hothouses burst through the seams, whipped around my head, and yanked. Eye rolling up in to my head, I dropped on all fours, ears pressed to earth, and heard the world singing like crickets, with that in-and-out beat of the tides, of the blood in our veins, and I knew that it was all over."

Cliff says

Oh my goodness...this book....

I d

Rebecca McNutt says

Good story, but this book stopped making sense several times and I didn't really relate well to the characters. It was very *Lord of the Flies*-esque.

spoon says

cw in book: rape, assault, domestic abuse, prostitution, childhood sexual abuse, anti-blackness in korea, abandonment, etc

dang. keller took on a helluva load to write this book. the intensity in which she moves through difficult moment to difficult moment to a heart-wrenching moment to a moment that i had to pull away from, at times, to pace around the house, caught in a daze of triggering scene-after-scene that catapulted me into my own traumas—i, phew. take pause while reading this. it is about the effect of the american military's occupation of korea in the 60s. the way it shaped families. every colonial space is a violent and loud interchange of histories. this was an easy but hard read. it felt very very alive. the way it was written bothered me slightly. at times i have a difficult time reading things that seem to re-traumatize for the sake of re-traumatizing, without a holding ground for the reader to fall back onto. or rather — sometimes the prose moved in such a way that the language itself felt traumatizing—the language itself felt invasive. which i guess i understand. but i think this book should definitely come with a list of content warnings. to tread lightly into it, for it is carrying a world of hurt.

Erin says

After living in Korea for almost 2 years I thought I should read this book. I must say I wasn't happy with that decision until the very end.

This book shows a very different view of Korea right after the "end" of the Korean War and how American's GIs treated the locals. In some parts the book got so dark and descriptive that it made me uncomfortable and sad. I kept reading it hoping that somehow there would be a resolve to all the wretchedness.

Keller is definitely a talented writer and I must say I'm very curious about her other books, especially the one that is supposed to come after *Fox Girl*.

Russell Bittner says

I'm going to have to make an assumption where *Fox Girl* is concerned – namely, that the apparent success of this novel was due exclusively to the earlier success of *Comfort Woman*, Nora Okja Keller's first novel, one portion of which she later titled "Mother Tongue." That particular portion won her a Pushcart Prize.

There are a few well-executed scenes in this novel, but they are indeed few and far between. Most of the action and dialogue is something I'll call – for lack of a better word – 'jittery.' This is simply not the stuff of

a seasoned writer, never mind of a Pushcart Prize winner.

What I *will* concede, however, is that Ms. Keller very convincingly exposes the less-than-attractive underbelly of post-war Seoul. On the basis of what I know (from my reading) about our quasi-occupational presence in the Philippines, I'd have to conclude after reading *Fox Girl* that American soldiers and sailors don't paint a very pretty picture wherever they gather in foreign ports around in the world. Moreover, that portion of the indigenous population that chooses to service them is every bit as unattractive.

You shouldn't expect to enjoy anything about this book. And a Pushcart Prize winner (or at least her editor) should know better than to mistake the word 'disinterested' for 'uninterested,' as we find it on p. 260. However, I, for one, don't regret the education on the life and fast times of Korean prostitutes – and in gratitude, am awarding Ms. Keller one star more than I might otherwise have done.

RRB

11/06/15

Brooklyn, NY

Sarah Schantz says

I had to take my time with this book. The subject matter is hard. The subject matter is made even harder by the fact I am the mother of a thirteen-year-old girl--a girl who is older than some of the child prostitutes featured in this heart-breaking novel. I took my time with this book, and yet, I never turned away from it, because to do so would be to also turn away from the narrator; somehow I always believed the smart and empathetic Hyun Jin would find a way to survive the brutality of her world.

As a writer, I often turn to animals to help me write my own characters so I really appreciated the way Nora Okja Keller wrote Hyun Jin to be like a fox; but she didn't just use the fox metaphor for her, but for Sookie too, and finally to describe the resilience of Myu Myu to transform--to be who she came from, but to also be who she was becoming.

Furthermore, I was very impressed by the author's ability to write culture, and the clashes of culture between America and Korea, between Korea and Korean "America Town," between Korean "America Town," and the Korean sex clubs in Hawaii. There was a ferocious honesty in the way Keller wrote mistranslated words, or how customs got confused, and tragically (and ironically) how the America the mixed-race characters worshiped, was the very same America which oppressed them, belittled them, used them, and spit them out when there was nothing else to take. Even though this book was primarily set in Korea, it should be taught in American Literature and/or American History classes.

Andrea Dennison says

I was medium on this book when I first started, but by the end it managed to charm me. A rather harsh look at the lives people lead when they're trying to survive in horrible circumstances.

Emma Deplores Goodreads Censorship says

Fox Girl is a brilliant "awareness novel", transporting the reader to 1960s Korea, where women trapped in a culture of prostitution struggle to survive in "America Town," serving the American soldiers on the local base. Narrated by the teenage Hyun Jin and focusing mainly on herself and friends Sookie and Lobetto, it shows how multiple generations are trapped into a cycle of exploitation, especially children of prostitutes and American soldiers. The characters and their lives are realistic; clearly, the author knows of what she writes.

Still, an exposé doesn't automatically make a great novel, and there were a few problems that prevent me from recommending it wholeheartedly. The most irritating while I was reading was the problem of time: the story covers several years, during which the lead female characters become involved in prostitution, get pregnant, etc... and we never know how old they are at any given time! The prologue presents Sookie's age at a couple of key moments, but this information doesn't fit with the amount of time that seems to have elapsed in the text, and it's unclear how old everyone else is in relation to Sookie--she and Hyun Jin appear to be the same age at the beginning, until about 1/3 of the way in, when we discover that Sookie is two years older... although she claims to remember Hyun Jin's birth, which she could not have if she was two. And so forth. This was a problem for me throughout the book, although other readers might not be bothered.

Then there was the fact that all the main characters were just plain unlikable. Now, I know, they were prostitutes and pimps, they were leading rough lives, and they seemed quite realistic as they were. Still, the author seemed to be going out of her way to make them seem unpleasant, which made it hard for me to care about their struggles; I would have had more sympathy for Hyun Jin if the author hadn't spent the first 100 pages showing us what an insensitive friend she was and how she bullied other kids. And the early scene where her parents kicked her out seemed random and contrived. There were some other minor issues as well: Korean words were used without any translation, and continuity problems (Hyun Jin commenting on the relationship between Sookie and Lobetto only to be surprised later on by what she already knew, etc.).

I've written a lot criticizing this book, but I agree with a lot of the things the positive reviewers have stated: if you're looking for a gritty, realistic book (and I mean seriously gritty; expect group sex, bestiality, etc., to be described in some detail) about the lives of Korean prostitutes, this is your book. Just don't say I didn't warn you.

Lizy says

Oh, my god.

This book was rough. I don't mean it was bad--quite the opposite. It was heavy. Soul-heavy. You know those books that seem to rip at the fiber of your being and remind you that humanity maybe isn't the best thing ever? Like you read it and it's so gritty you kinda just want to take a shower? I raise you Fox Girl.

Fox Girl is a novel set in Korea in the 60s. It follows a cast of characters in America Town - a slum outside of an army base - and painstakingly details just what it was like, from the prevalence of alcoholism and prostitution to the complexity of racism and class struggle.

As I read this book, I kept thinking back to Pachinko, by Min Jin Lee. Although they're written nearly 14 years apart and the books take place in different countries, I feel like these two novels could be sister works and I think my reception of this book would have been very different if I hadn't read Pachinko first.

If you've haven't heard of or read Pachinko, let me give you a quick synopsis: it's a dynastic tale starting back when Japan was colonizing Korea, and ending in 1989. It follows a Korean family who emigrates to Japan and details all of their struggles. Like Fox Girl, it's an amazing story and I recommend both works. What separates the two novels is that in Pachinko, the really gory details are glossed over and left out. There's 2 characters who are rumored to be taken as comfort girls, but it's never even confirmed that's their fate.

Fox Girl is the perfect mirror. There's characters who make it out of America Town and into something better, but you never see them firsthand. Instead, you're painted a crystal-clear image of the awful situation within the slum. From the trip to the Monkey House to seeing Duk Hee in the windowed room barely able to recognize her own daughter, Fox Girl doesn't hold back. I would almost argue it's transgressive lit: instead of upholding humanity, instead of displaying hope or saying "here's the good thing about us" it tells the raw truth. Racism is ingrained. Cycles are repeated. People can harbor deeply-rooted hatred and do wicked things without batting an eye. Sometimes there isn't a happy ending. Sometimes, we're selfish and we choose to turn a blind eye or steal from those who are truly in need.

I think it's an important lesson to hear and an important story to read. Is it a bitter pill to swallow? Absolutely. Does it fill you with hope and wholesomeness like Pachinko will? Not really. But I think this book makes for perfect follow up reading. And if you've read this but haven't read the other, I'd recommend that, too. There's something to be learned from reading about the dark underbelly of things.

Rania2000123 says

I think I will love it

Bert Edens says

"Fox Girl" is the second book in Keller's series about Korea, the first being "Comfort Woman".

This story primarily centers around Hyun-Jin, a teen growing up in post-Korean War South Korea. She, along with her on-again, off-again friends Sookie and Lobetto survive the best they can in America Town, an area setup to service American G.I.s stationed in their country. Not surprisingly, prostitution plays a central role in this story, and Keller pulls no punches, especially with Hyun-Jin's deflowering.

"Fox Girl" moves along through various conflicts and resolutions, even moving the storyline briefly to Hawai'i. You follow along as Hyun-Jin, Sookie, Lobetto (a "Tweggi" or mixed-breed Korean) struggle with their own families, their places in society, and their relationships with each other, sometimes going for long periods without encountering each other while other times doing everything together.

This is a wonderful story that really allows you to care about not just Hyun-Jin, but all the characters in the story. While there are hints about what happens to the minor characters toward the end of the book, you find yourself wondering what happened to all of them. This is a sure sign of great character development.

Jeanne says

Currently taking a course in Asian-American Women Writers and this book was one of the required

readings. With that being said, it has been a long time since I actually enjoyed a book I (had) to read.

Extremely thrilling and informative of the harsh realities of kiji'chons. Character development of Hyun Jin, Sookie, and Lobetto is incredible. I still have scenes from the book in my mind. Would be very interested to see this being turned into a movie. And being from Hawaii, I whole heartedly appreciate the ending of the novel.
