



Author's Note

In my family, we're pretty good cooks, decent singers, and fascinated with gossip and strange tales. But as far as magic goes, we're duds.

Still, I wanted to write about magic in families because it's one way of talking about those secret histories, the stories that are never written, the ones that are never going to make it into history books or the precise diagrams of a genealogy. I love the tall tales that are scoffed at and disputed, but still get talked about late at night or when no one else could possibly be awake in the morning, shared at kitchen tables or on long car rides; in short, I wanted to think about how we learn and love the stories ones that get passed

down as lore among generations of (mostly) women, and yes, about the gossip and the strange traits that no one outside of the family ever understands or believes.

In *The Glowing Life of Leeann Wu*, Leeann has only piecemeal knowledge of her own background. She doesn't know her father, she's never met her other relatives—or so she thinks. She's a third culture kid, a person who grown up in a culture other than the one her mother grew up in and is now exploring what makes her who she is, figuring out how all these elements hang together—and how her different parts make her something new, wonderful, and powerful.

That's some kind of magic right there.

Discussion Questions

1. In stories, many characters gain their powers in childhood or when they're on the cusp of adulthood. What difference do you think Leeann's age makes in her approach to her powers, how she feels about them, and what she does with them?
2. Both Leeann's mother and her daughter push her to be what they think she should be. What do you think of Leeann as a character? Are any of the other characters' self assessments accurate?
3. The Wus are caught between being scientifically minded and not being able to explain what is happening to them. Do you believe in magic or things that have nothing do with science? Have you had spiritual and/or supernatural experiences?
4. Leeann is scared to take action once she realizes she could die trying to help her town. What would your reaction be if faced with having to save your community at great risk to yourself?
5. Many of the characters and side characters complain about insomnia and sleep problems. What do you think of how sleeplessness affects the townspeople? How do you think this affliction could affect people long term?
6. Leeann worries Kenji is too young love her and Kenji worries Leeann is too powerful and accomplished to love him. What do you think of their relationship and how do you see it progressing down the road?
7. What did you think of the friendship between Parisa and Leeann? What do you think of the notion that Parisa brings up of histories that are passed down among women?
8. At one point, Leeann's mother says, "I have never understood how to talk to you... I don't know how to tell you about any of these things, because there is something more than language that separates us." Do you speak a different language from your parents or other family members? Does that complicate the preservation of your family history?
9. How do Leeann and her mother's understanding of each other change as they learn more about Leeann's abilities?
10. When Leeann and her family start practicing their magic together, Leeann says, "It wasn't quite the quality time I'd envisioned spending with Lulu before she left, [but] it was something of ours, a ritual we'd made out of an old gift, but in a new way." Have you heard of the term "third culture kid," that is. people who were raised in a country or culture other than that of their parents'? Does your family have traditions that take elements from your culture of origin and those of the one you live in to create a third, blended tradition?



Q&A With Mindy Hung

What snack fuels your writing sessions?

You can tell by my snacks how desperate I'm getting. If I have a whole day to write, or if I get a morning writing session, I'll start with a banana and a mug of Barrie's decaf black tea with milk.

If I have an afternoon session and I'm not climbing the walls trying to get characters to behave or working on a particularly thorny edit, I may have some cashews and cheese. But if things are getting hairy, I need that stress crunch: pretzels or a handful of kettle-cooked chips stuffed right in my mouth and gnashed with angry teeth.

If I have to write late at night—never a good sign—I need chocolate.

What's one trope you'll never get tired of writing (or reading)?

The Glowing Life of Leeann Wu does not use this trope, but I absolutely love enemies-to-lovers. I love writing and reading dialogue that skates that thin edge between enmity and attraction. I love it when characters are dropping perfect, beautiful insults as their fiery mouths move closer together. I love that moment when one of them goes too far, causes real hurt, and there's real regret, but it's too late, because the worst thing is already out there, hanging between them: That moment when we realize the enemy knows you a little too well because they've always watched you too closely? *Put it in my veins.*

If your book had a scent, what would it smell like?

In most of *The Glowing Life of Leeann Wu*, the characters are living through the hottest, most humid summer of their lives, so I'd say overall the book smells like sunscreen and sweat with a slight burning whiff of lightning, and every now and then, a breeze teasing the scent of rain.

What's a line or moment from your book that makes you laugh or smile every time you think of it?

When Leeann first meets Kenji, her love interest, she thinks this about him:

I didn't really want to go out with Kenji anyway. Getting dressed up for an actual date, making stilted conversation in order to know the other person's career goals, remembering my table manners, talking about movies and shows I didn't have time to watch. Being disappointed. That all seemed tiring and required too much long-term planning. All I wanted from Kenji was to pull his body down onto me and feel his weight on mine, like a big, sexy weighted blanket.

What I love about this is how cynical Leeann is about men and dating, but how she also clearly yearns for the comfort of companionship. Also, like Leeann, I sometimes just want a weighted blanket and no conversation.

What was the first story you ever wrote, and would you let anyone read it today?

The first story I *remember* writing (there were many before this, I'm sure) was an assignment for Halloween. I think I was in 4th grade, and the climax involved people's heads falling off. It was probably inspired by that tale about the woman with the black ribbon around her neck that she never took off. But mine ended with the classic, "Thank goodness it was all a dream."

I'm sure people would get a laugh out of the old story. I know I wouldn't mind reading it again.

Playlist

You can listen to all the tracks except for Summer from the Four Seasons by Vivaldi on [Spotify](#) or watch the whole list on [YouTube](#).

1. Summertime Sadness - Lana Del Rey
2. I Want to Be Here – case/lang/veirs
3. Glow Worm – Mills Brothers
4. The Bike Song – Kate and Anna McGarrigle
5. Back in My Body – Maggie Rogers
6. Summer (Movement 3) The Four Seasons – Antonio Vivaldi
*I love this dynamic version performed by Ray Chen which is only available on [YouTube](#).
7. Violin Tsunami – Kishi Bashi
8. We’ve Got You – Vienna Teng
9. The Greatest Love of All – Whitney Houston
10. Lullabye for a Stormy Night – Vienna Teng

Bonus Track: I Sing the Body Electric – Irene Cara and the cast of Fame