Episode 138 Transcript: Interview with Cherry Lou Sy

Episode Duration: 46:36

[Music interlude fades in]

Jennifer Baker
Hello and welcome to the 10th anniversary year of the Minorities in Publishing podcast. I'm your host, Jennifer Baker. The minorities in publishing podcast first aired on August 14, 2014, and this year, I'll be celebrating with new guests, return guests, and some book giveaways for new and returning listeners. You may know you can find the podcast at minorities in publishing dot com, as well as on Twitter and Instagram at minorities in pub. You can also sign up for the monthly MIP newsletter for info on new episodes, guests and industry news as well as job or writing opportunities. Minorities in Publishing is available wherever you listen to podcasts, including Spotify, Apple podcasts, Google podcasts, TuneIn and iHeartRadio. It's also available on the podcasting hosting server, Libsyn—l, i, b, s, y, n. Thanks so much for listening, and hope you enjoy this episode. [music fades out]

Hey, welcome to the latest episode of the Minorities of Publishing podcast. While we recorded this at the end of 2024, y'all are listening to it at the beginning of 2025, so Happy New Year! And I'm really, really happy to talk to debut author Cherry Lou Sy about her debut novel, *Love Can't Feed You*. Thank you so much for taking time to talk to me this weekend.

Cherry Lou Sy
Thank you for inviting me. I'm so happy to actually be talking to you. You know, I've been listening to your podcast for a little bit. And, you know, I used to imagine, what would it be like for me to be a guest on Jenn's show. And here I am, so living the dream.

Jennifer Baker
At some point we do have to see each other in person, because we are both in New York City.

Cherry Lou Sy
That's true.

Jennifer Baker
We can make that happen. But right now we're in our comfy weekend gear, just chatting. Just two writers chatting about life, and that debut life at that. And I'm happy to talk about your book because there's so many different themes that have come up. And it had me think about some other books that have recently come out as well. There's so much distinction in the story because Queenie is quite an interesting character. So before we get into that, because I will front load and be like so let's just talk about this girl. Is it fair to ask you? And I always phrase it like that, because sometimes it is, after writing a whole book, it is not easy to truncate what that means, summarize what the book is, because it's bigger than, I think, just a coming of age story, a young woman, well, her family, her whole family, immigrating to the United States and really seeing a shift in the family dynamic.

Cherry Lou Sy
You're right. I think I tried truncating everything you know, making that elevator pitch. If you know what I mean, but it's been hard. And I think the the elevator pitch I've come up with is that there's this

family from the Philippines, and they are coming to New York to reunite with the mother who came ahead of them, working as a nurse, and she in coming to the United States, changed so it's not the reunion that they're all expecting, and instead of living what they all thought would be the American dream, it slowly becomes an American nightmare for them, as the family falls apart in the quest for assimilation.

Jennifer Baker
Yeah, it made me think even more deeply about how geography really changes us, right? You know, even if we go from one state to another, right. I am different. I'm still having that, I don't know about you, but, like, I'm having that New York [City] sensibility, because I'm born and raised here, but ultimately the way things work changes you. And so there's that resentment that comes from the family, but everyone is becoming changed, right? I feel like there's when we're as we're reading, us as readers, we're being introduced to the mom in this different state, especially Queenie, because she's our guide. She's the protagonist here is really showing us, well, this isn't how Mom is. And the father's like not having it, and the brother is like her little brother [whatever]. But ultimately, each of them are also being changed by a confluence of factors, but especially because this changes you, like you said, assimilation, the path to this changes you. And I saw these parallels with your book—and I read *Catalina* also this year—of these really interesting coming of age from women of color protagonists who are kind of in this teenage, young/new adult phase in their lives, really trying to figure a lot out on their own. Folks talk about *The Catcher in the Rye* a lot. As for many of us, that was the coming of age book a lot of us read, if we were educated in the U.S. But for me, like books like yours and *Catalina* are those coming of age that I think we really need for these upcoming generations to be exposed to,

Cherry Lou Sy
Yeah, and it's interesting because I didn't read *Catalina* yet. I'm so behind reading, but I know that the protagonist Catalina, right, she ends up in Harvard. So Queenie ends up in a CUNY School. So just the complete opposite of [her].

Jennifer Baker
Shouts to CUNY.

Cherry Lou Sy
But, and I feel, like a lot of stories I've read of people of color in New York, they never end up in CUNY schools. I feel, you know, it's always like, Oh, they end up in Harvard or whatever. But I really wanted the protagonist to be, I mean, I didn't go to CUNY School for my undergrad. I went to NYU, so I thought I needed to feel like the protagonist is in CUNY, because I've taught in CUNY for some time. And then I wanted a reflection also of some of the students I've met, which tend to have a background very similar to Queenie's—you know, a lot of immigrant or low income or or even those who are from middle class or high income. It's very interesting. It's an interesting mix.

Jennifer Baker
It really is, because I was a CUNY student in undergrad because I got a full scholarship.

Cherry Lou Sy
Oh, where'd you go?

Jennifer Baker
I went to City [College].

Cherry Lou Sy
Oh, yeah.

Jennifer Baker
And I lived in Queens. I've lived in Queens most of my life, as I did the whole commute. And now I adjunct at City, yeah. And before that, I was working in the Writing Center at Baruch [College], which I really loved. Like I've actually really enjoyed the teaching. But to your point, it is interesting, because when I was in CUNY in the very, very end of the 20th century, coming into the 21st, the campaign for CUNY was to bring in more of a swath financially. And they had this huge honors campaign, this huge Honors College campaign. Like it was initiated, but then it really got more funding. And the way you would see them advertise CUNY schools as "you gotta come here." Y'all like CUNY? CUNY is the place to be. And now it's kind of fulfilled that to an extent. It's interesting to your point. And I really love that you pinpoint that, because I think even in Daphne's book, Daphne [Palasi] Andreades, it is *Brown Girls*, she kind of mentions it, but it doesn't go into it the way you do with Queenie, and that we're experiencing it with Queenie. Because Queenie does have these aspirations that you keep being kind of tugged in these different directions, right?

Cherry Lou Sy
Oh, and I also wanted to bring up libraries and how important they are as public institutions. So I did want to highlight that, too. Because in the story, Queenie doesn't know anything. It's the librarian who helps her kind of put her foot in in the system, so to speak. And that was important for me to have a scene like that. Libraries are just unsung heroes, and librarians, of course, are unsung heroes in a lot of these adventures.

Jennifer Baker
Can you talk a little bit more about what led to *Love Can't Feed You*? Has this been a book that's been percolating for a while for you that you knew this was the book you had to get out, and this is really the way you wanted to debut?

Cherry Lou Sy
So, I didn't realize that it was percolating for a while this particular the particular incarnation of the story into this book, I didn't realize it would be like that, because I am a playwright, right? Like I did my MFA in playwriting. I think it was in 2015 I was taking a class. At first I was a student in Jessica Hagedorn's fiction, well, it was like a mixed genre. And then she had us read a book by Marguerite Duras, *The Lover*. And if anyone doesn't know *The Lover*, I think you should read it. It's very interesting. What I found fascinating about it is that it is a coming of age, but very unusual, because it's set in French IndoChina. So it was not Vietnam yet, it was French IndoChina. So a colonial period where you have a white woman who is sort of in between feeling she's not quite French, because she was born and raised in French IndoChina, and then her family was super poor. And she ends up meeting this very wealthy man, who's Chinese, and then they start this love affair where he was giving her gifts and money, and through that, her family was able to survive. And I was super fascinated by this. And it's some people call the book a memoir or autofiction, but I was super fascinated with it, because I had never, until that moment, read anything where a Chinese man was the love interest, because the way how I grew up, so

I'm half Chinese and half Filipino, and where I grew up in the Philippines, the Chinese are maligned. Usually you don't think of Chinese people is, like, sexy, basically, or what have you. So I was thinking about this a lot because of just how this woman, you know, she was 15 in the book, the Chinese guy was 27, you know. And I was thinking about my own background with my parents. So my mom, when she married my dad, I think she was, Oh, my God, I can't believe I'm not sure now, but 19 or 20 and then he was almost 40, so they had a big age gap. Reading this book made me think about their relationship and how tumultuous it was because my parents, they're divorced, remarried twice, and both looking for a third partner or what have you. So, when my dad was still alive, because he had passed as well, you know, *The Lover* had started sort of a worm in my brain going like, what if these people had a child, you know? And what if I superimposed that with the parents, the relationship my parents had, and how I saw that growing up? And that idea would not leave me. It just I became obsessed with it. And, you know, throughout my MFA program, I was working on other plays, what have you. But slowly, I was just writing something, you know, until I think I was just super depressed my last semester of my MFA program. And then I decided, okay, I don't know if I'm going to be writing plays right now, you know? And then I spoke to Mac Wellman, who was in charge of the program, the MFA playwriting program, and he said, write a novel. Go experiment, write a novel. So then I ended up taking a class at Catapult, the novel generator, when they still had it. I wrote my first draft. It was very difficult in that program. So that's how the book sort of started. It just, it was a worm that would not leave me until it like, I don't know, it felt like parasitic almost.

Jennifer Baker
And then, so how was that process of, actually, you know, kind of, I won't say eradicating, because that's not what writing is. But it is getting something out, you know what? I mean, it is really kind of like a purging to an extent of when these stories really kind of speak to you, to your point, the pressing elements that come through kind of really need to, they still need to be developed in a way. And so how was that for you really kind of checking in with, "okay, this is what the story is," and getting the feedback like working your way to the point where you're collaborating with not just an agent, but then a publisher?

Cherry Lou Sy
Right. So it was very complicated, because at first I didn't have the discipline that you need to be working on a novel. I mean, the amount of discipline you need to be able to, first of all, finish that first draft. You learn so much about the story. You learn so much about yourself. But then and you think that, oh my god, I'm done, right? No, you're not. This is just the beginning. And then you keep going, and you keep looking at the details, because you're creating a world. It's so different from writing a play, because when you're writing a play, once you finish a draft, you can invite actors to just read it out loud, and you can get collaboration very easily. I mean, even in Broadway, for example. You think it's done when they've agreed to have the production up, but no even, I mean, that's why they have previews, so that they can still change the draft, you know. So it's very fluid, but not so much in novel land, right? Because you have to be sure that this draft is the one that you want to go out. Like it's fixed. It was a very, very hard process, you know, and I had to learn how to become a writer of prose.

Jennifer Baker
'Cause I took so many classes. I took screenwriting writing in undergrad. I wasn't a creative writing major in undergrad. And those things do kind of feed each other, you now. That playwriting acumen you have is also feeding the novel, but I also agree it's a very different discipline.

Cherry Lou Sy
Yeah, and it's cumulative, right? It's not like you take a class now and then nothing happens. I feel like every class I've taken, I mean, there were a lot of classes too. Every class that I've taken and every failure I've had, I think, cumulatively affected and impacted how I write something that I've been thinking about as well. Because this, this came up for me. A lot people were assuming that I was writing my life story and that this was a memoir. I was a guest for another podcast, and the podcaster had actually apologized to me because it was being marketed that in by her team, that it was a memoir. And, you know, I said, it's not a memoir.

Jennifer Baker
No way! It says novel.

Cherry Lou Sy
I know. And then, and then she realized that. So there was an apology and and it was interesting. So, so we talked about that, and then weeks later, it popped up again in her social media that it was a memoir. And something interesting happened as well. Because I have two friends who, one is a writer, but he's not published yet, right? So he also thought that the book was a memoir, and I said it's not. And then I have another friend who is not a writer at all, very blue collar. And I had a disagreement with her because she came to my book launch, actually asked me if this was real. I said no. And I didn't think that was the time to be questioning me about that. Then she kept messaging me, asking, Why should she read something that wasn't real. You know, why should she put her time and energy into something that she didn't think was not true, and that was maligning people. I mean, she's white, and I got offended. So I asked her, I didn't say I was offended, but I was clearly annoyed. I said, "Are you offended for Filipino people?" And she didn't say yes, but she said she felt badly for them that I was not portraying them in a good light. I thought, wow. So I told her, then you can stop reading if you don't know how fiction works and and I've already told you that this is fiction, and if you want to believe that you can only read this if it's nonfiction, I recommended her a different book that was nonfiction, and I said you can read this instead. So it made me think about this idea of autofiction, fiction, nonfiction, and memoir, and how, you know, and how there's such a fine line between, what do we write about? What do we have rights to write about?

And then I started reading this book by Hernan Diaz, *Trust*, which won the Pulitzer in 2022 and it was fascinating, because I didn't know much about him, and there's absolutely no self identity in his book, you know? And then I read last night, actually an interview that he had done, and it impacted me so much that I actually screenshotted what I read and then circled it, because if it's okay, I'm just going to read what he had written here. He said, "I find the impossibility of us truly touching one another through language, not only heart grinding, but esthetically more interesting than the notion of immediate connection. If I ever find myself on the page, I view it as an immense failure for me. Writing and erasing myself are one in the same. A sentence succeeds because it conjures up something other than me." And I felt personally attacked. Because I think my writing process has always been I need to find myself in the writing I or even the reading of something. Because growing up, I felt erased so much that I needed to find myself in the writing and in the reading. So I've been thinking about it since last night, since this morning, you know, and that's that's been on my mind about this idea of what literature is for, what is fiction for? You know, what is writing for? I mean, do you are you supposed to erase yourself, as Hernan Diaz is saying, or in my case, I feel like, "No, I have to find myself." Because when I felt constantly erased, it was just in the writing of something or in the reading of something and finding myself that I

felt that I was real as an individual, and that my experiences were not just made up, yeah, it's just writing has extracted from me this idea of exorcising demons, but also exercising a self that felt so erased.

Jennifer Baker
Mm, that's deep. That's deep, Cherry. That's also like, Ugh, shenanigans. So I'm sorry you had to deal with that because it's already such a vulnerable place to share your work, and you're being inundated, to an extent, with questions, and sometimes it's the same question over and over and over. So for someone to kind of like, invalidate, if that's fair to say, also just to kind of like, push back against something that is very understood by you, and to also not recognize what fiction does is wild. And also, I would recommend *Nervous* by Jen Soriano. But also I would recommend a lot of other things to this person as well that aren't books.

[20:42]

Cherry Lou Sy
But it made me think that this idea of reading, you know, what is reading for? I think I did some subreddits where people were not happy with this proliferation of narrators speaking in the first person versus third person. So I thought that was also interesting. You know, it's like.

Jennifer Baker
What? And there's such a preference in terms of genre, of what that exactly like, you know, like, there's some ways it's kind of set up for us as artists to be like, Well, generally, ya, is first person, you know. Like, I've experienced that from from folks. I'm like, Oh, this book needs to be where, where it needs to be, yeah, and when you write a book like, *Love Can't Feed You* where you have someone like Queenie. Like Queenie, to me, represents herself, but also the reality of how you have to kind of navigate things when you when you're adult systems. You know what I mean, like when the parental figures in your life are not really giving you what you need or right? Like the base need is you have a roof over your head, you have food, you have the base needs, which is absolutely part of it understood, and that kind of chasm of but there's this differentiation of what expectations are and what needs are, and how none of this is being communicated, or when it's communicated, it's not done very well by any party. And so it just felt very understandable how Queenie was trying to navigate things, of not wanting to be a good girl, of not wanting to be her mom, of not like, Well, who am I? And right? My once invalidated, and also the inherent misogyny of our own cultures, of our own families, because the boy becomes the prize, but the young woman is needs to be dutiful, right, right? And I feel like that's also relatable across cultures.

Cherry Lou Sy
Absolutely yeah. It feels like that's the bread and butter of the cultures that preceded us. You know, sometimes I also wonder about, you know, this idea of returning to the past, because I'm also someone who, who values tradition, etc, etc. But sometimes I do ask myself, when do we push back on tradition? When do we push back on on the selves that this tradition is imposing on us, you know, and our children and you know, our expectations and things like that, because it's so hard to to navigate. Which tradition do you keep? Which tradition do you sort of let go into history,

Jennifer Baker
And what ones have been erased?

Cherry Lou Sy
Yeah, that too. That too. Yeah, that too. That too.

Jennifer Baker
Or I wonder a lot when we look at the binary of how much the femme has been displaced as a power figure, or what that it's shifted into meaning when we look at imperialism, you know, I don't even know if we as authors always recognize how deep we're going. We're presenting a reality, right? And it doesn't have to be, oh, this is Cherry Lou's memoir—*which it is not* —is an understood complication of life and that you understand, right? And that's the expertise and experience you're bringing to these very specific characters.

Cherry Lou Sy
Right. I mean, this friend of mine also said, what was the point of writing fiction that read like memoir? Like I did not even know how to answer her.

Jennifer Baker
And also, what does that mean? I totally get a little bit of being stupefied there, of like, I don't know how to answer this, because this really read like fiction to me. Because I'm like, I don't need to be told something's a novel to experience it as a novel, per se. It doesn't hurt. It can't hurt. I really, I don't think, but I'm like, you're bringing up some really great questions for me, Cherry, in this experience of how people are responding, and I wonder if this is also putting us as people of color, in this place where we where we might subconsciously feel like our characters need to be so far away from us to not have to deal with these freaking questions.

Cherry Lou Sy
Right. Because, you know, we can only write about ourselves and only in ourselves. So it's not lost on me that my friend, you know, I mean, she's white, like I I don't know what else to say. I mean, not to say.

Jennifer Baker
What's the common denominator here?

Cherry Lou Sy
Yeah, and that she felt insulted for Filipino you know what? I cannot compute this in my in my mind. And I was talking about this with one of my Filipino writer friends, he's unpublished, but he said he and his mom read my book, and they felt like it was an accurate and fair representation, and they did not feel offended, you know, because I was thinking, Is it me? Am I crazy? You know, am I gaslighting myself.

Jennifer Baker
Right, right. And that's not something you want to feel pre, during, or post publication, right? Is feeling like that.

Cherry Lou Sy
And also, we're not monolithic, right? Like, if we write, it doesn't mean that we represent the entirety of the ethnic backgrounds we are.

Jennifer Baker
Right, right. I remember working with Jen Soriano on *Nervous* which is essays as memoir or essay collection that can be read like a memoir. And you know, that is the *I*, that very much is, this is me. This is me, and that is a vulnerable place to be. And it's a vulnerable place to be as a fiction writer, a poet, graphic novelist, hybrid, whatever. Where like you have Queenie and her mom and what stands out to me is that the mom is under pressure, and maybe this is just me being a 40-year old something, woman who has felt that pressure, right? I really get that pressure in a different way, even though I don't have kids. I was like, Yeah, Mom, get you some. You've got a man who's good and bad, like, girl, do you.

Cherry Lou Sy
Yeah, that's the thing, right? And there's this, this interesting dichotomy, where, if you are in it, it's gonna suck, but then outside of it, you know, there's the people who laud Mel, she's the the mother, Queenie's mom, and say, "You go, girl, you are getting what you deserve." You know, you've worked hard, you're you're getting the things.

Jennifer Baker
Right, right. I worry that when we come into fiction too, it's like we judging people. So I'm curious about your thoughts on that, because I apologize, it seems I interrupted you.

Cherry Lou Sy
Yeah. I mean, they're based on people that I know, of course, with a lot of liberties, and then things like that. I've seen situations also where, traditionally, you know, in home countries, women are more subservient to men, and then there's a flip that happens when they come here, because it's it usually becomes the woman who becomes the breadwinner. So what happens to the original hierarchy when that's flipped. I feel like a lot of divorces happen. And so I used to work in a hospital as a clerk, and I met a lot of people where, where this has happened, right where the woman leaves the family behind. There's actually this nursing aide, one of my mom's friends, who did not bring her family here because the husband felt humiliated by her. So it's interesting to me that there's a lot of play also, because the women are finding more independence, because now they're earning. Not only are they earning their own money, now they're expected to provide for a village back home, right? So they gain this independence. They gain this sense of worth which they may not have had before, and this other identity, and that does not quite fit in with the hierarchy that everyone back home has developed, and that's something of the American self. You know, I saw a lot of that.

Jennifer Baker
Those pressures build. Those pressures really build. And the ways that, you know, I felt like she, the mom, I just felt like she just didn't know, she didn't have the tools to really engage with her family in a way that really presented how emotional this was for her. No spoilers, but they get in some knockdown, drag out fights. This is some things are said that it's like, oh, you can't take that back.

Cherry Lou Sy
Oh yeah. The plate been broken. It cannot be glued.

Jennifer Baker
Right! Oh no. Oh, hurt. That was painful.

Cherry Lou Sy
All the shards are on the floor now.

Jennifer Baker
Yeah, literally, figuratively, psychologically, all of it, yeah, my goodness, yeah. It's just so rich with a lot of complexity. It's just a complex book. And I'm curious if you'd be open to talking about your, you know, the editorial relationship and all that. Especially as you're preparing to further develop and get this book out in the world of how that was when you, you know, found the right person to partner with. I always want to say, partner and collaborator. Publishers need authors. They need creators, and they need to woo you. It is not simply like you don't owe them, though it is important, and it feels like this really was crucial for you in such a vulnerable book for, you know, a family that's in a vulnerable situation.

[30:37]
Cherry Lou Sy
So my editor is Pilar Garcia Brown at Dutton, and when we talked the first time, I just felt immediately comfortable with her. And, you know, we laughed a bunch of times. And I think she understood where Queenie was coming from, and that was important to me because I had heard of other situations where the editor did not get what the book was about, and then they wanted a completely different book. So that was not the case with Pilar. She just wanted to turn up the dial on, on certain things, you know. And the editorial process, I would say, was not, it wasn't difficult. I think when I got my editorial letter from her. I took maybe two months before I started really getting into the edits, because I wanted to think about the things that she had pointed out and whether I resonated with them. And then, because it's a skill I'm still learning, you know, the editing and all of that I had to be okay with, with killing my darlings, I realized that certain paragraphs, certain story lines, I was being precious with that maybe I shouldn't be as precious with them as as I should, because it really is better if I move things around. If I cut this or if I cut that, you know, and so I was learning this part of myself, which is to let things go and let things be. And then to to be able to look at a bigger picture, like be able to zoom out, because I don't think that was something that I had even, let's say, two years ago or last year, I would say that it's something that I was slowly developing, this this eye and this ear for what is working, not just for right now, you know. Like, let's say this one page, it's working for that one page. But then when you zoom back and then you look at the entirety of the thing, you say, Oh, that is not working. So that was something that I slowly started learning, that zooming back that idea of, how does this speak to the rest of the book, I appreciated that. I feel like that was my biggest takeaway, you know, being not in service of me, but being in service of the work of the book, like, what? What makes it better?

Jennifer Baker
I love that. And that seems to be the running theme is really when folks latch on to, oh, this person really gets it, this person really gets it and knows how to discuss it with me. Right? Awesome. I love that. How have you been feeling in your debut year? Loaded question, because 2024, has been a lot. Yeah, a lot.

Cherry Lou Sy
My book came out October 8, which is, you know, not too long before the most insane election cycle ever. And so I just, I didn't know what to expect, and I did get some nice coverage. And I, I'm just so grateful that I even got any of that because it was published in October, in the fall. And, you know, we've seen a lot of heavy hitters this fall, so any kind of attention my little book got I'm so grateful because there is so much happening in the world one. There are so many amazing books that just came

out also, and they're still coming out. So, so I'm super grateful, but that still does not negate also, that there is this part of me that goes like, “Oh my God, I didn't get XYZ,” you know, or that it was snubbed by XYZ. So I try not to think about it. So I'm working on the next one. I've been working on the next one. And it’s so different from the current, you know, this book that just came out, that I'm feeling better about it, I realized so talking about the book, that I needed the distance, right? So I realized that with also this debut experience, that I need the distance, right? Because it's not just about this one book, like I was thinking about, well, what is the trajectory of my writing career? I mean, do I think I'm a one hit wonder? Is that why I was so fixated on the book? But then I was thinking, No, this is this is just my appetizer. There are other things that I'm working on that are percolating and that this book actually is different from what I'm working on and who I am right now. Like who I was when I was working on it was a different person. I mean talking about the shedding of the self, so I started feeling better about it, and also the fact that it's 2025, in a few weeks. So there's already talk about the books coming out for next year, you know.

And so I just have to feel, or I felt like I had to, just my husband was telling me this, just let go, let go and put it to God, you know. And I said, that's actually good advice: Just let it go. Get it together, because there's nothing else I can do. I I have done the best that I could for for my baby, right, and now it is out in the wild, and I should just let it do its thing. So, because now I'm just dating another idea, you know, and and focusing on that. So I can't really complain, you know, and I'm actually super grateful that the book came out when it did. And it could have been worse because of again, crazy, crazy year, but I got some attention. It got some attention. It was almost in TV. You know, there was one time that it was a finalist for Club Calvi. It's CBS is a book club [with Mary Calvi], and I didn't get it. I didn't win, but I almost could have been on TV, you know. So I just laugh about that now. So I'm just grateful. I'm grateful that it got the coverage that it did.

Jennifer Baker
And on top of that, you just never know the impact that's happening. Because there's the public and then there's the stuff you just don't know about what young readers, like maybe teens are reading Queenie's voice and really seeing something that speaks to them and speaking to what you said earlier about these aspects of representation and depictions that are so crucial. We just never know as artists, what's going on. I don't know if it's a heartening feeling considering the year we have had as a society, you know what I mean—nervous laughter. But I hope you know that like these books live on in ways that we just can't quantify.

Cherry Lou Sy
Right. Not to be all fatalist and everything, but this book will outlive me.

Jennifer Baker
No, that is true, especially since we have print on demand. Yeah. These are the facts, Cherry. These are the facts.

Cherry Lou Sy
I was thinking like, Is this morbid to think about that there is a time maybe when, what was it, the rights to the book become public domains.

Jennifer Baker

They do. They do every year. If there's this now in the public domain, sometimes it will be cherry louci. So maybe someone

Cherry Lou Sy
Someone will do an adaptation 500 years from now.

Jennifer Baker
Put that on the epitaph: my work will outlive me, everybody

Cherry Lou Sy
I do tend to be morbid. So…

Jennifer Baker 38:18
You know, sometimes I just call that pragmatism, like, I'm an optimist, I'm a, you know, I'm tend to be a Negative Nancy. I was like, you know, some of us are just really thinking about what's going to happen.

Cherry Lou Sy 38:30
Like talk about zooming out.

Jennifer Baker 38:34
Right! Like doesn't, you know, mean, I don't care about optimism, or I'm not. Can't be hopeful. It just be let's keep it real. Let's be realists, which might sound a little morbid at times, but *come on.*

Cherry Lou Sy
It's just dark humor. You know, we need a little dark humor.

Jennifer Baker 38:51
I know it's like, have *y'all read the book*? I mean Queenie? You gotta some dark humor. She's out here trying to live her best life and making mistakes, which is always so relatable, looking back and forward. So I just want to really congratulate you. Cherry on a really wonderful book. *Love Can't Feed You*. Can't emphasize enough, folks, I really do think this is also just a wonderful book to pair with Catalina and really talk about these generational expectations of the dangers of the American dream, like you said at the top of the episode, because I think that's just so pervasive and important in how we're seeing everything play out now, right? It's really, really crucial. And again, I don't know if you realize that, but I'm like, Oh, this is one of those books that really captures a moment, but it never stops speaking to time. So congratulations on that.

Cherry Lou Sy
Thank you. Thank you, Jenn, and thank you for you know, having me as a guest. It was one of the things. That I had wished before, so I feel elated that that's something I can check off now.

[40:07]

Jennifer Baker

Oh yay. Thank you for sharing this wonderful book with us and with *me*. I really am. It was just such a pleasure to read. And I also want to ask, are you on the internets? I'm admittedly hiding from there. But are you on the internets? So people can interact.

Cherry Lou Sy
I couldn't really hide because of the, you know, debut years.

Jennifer Baker
No that's, that's the kicker. That's, I know you.

Cherry Lou Sy
I had to, I had to be on socials, but, yeah, you can find me on Instagram. It's at sy.cherry, and I'm on the X. I don't post as much, but I do lurk. I'm also on blue sky, but not as active. I'm more active on Instagram, though.

Jennifer Baker
Are they all under the same name?

Cherry Lou Sy
No, the X is, uh, my full name, so cherrylousy, and then blue sky. It's the same cherrylousy. you'll find me if you Google, yeah, yeah.

Jennifer Baker 41:06
Yeah. And that's C, H, E, R, R, Y, L, O, U, S, Y, yes?

Cherry Lou Sy
Yes, yeah.

Jennifer Baker
And if anything, you know we're somewhere. We're in New York, exactly. Yeah. Obviously, only 9 million of us. I suspect like at least a third of that is artists.

Cherry Lou Sy
I have no doubt, I have no doubt.

Jennifer Baker
I might be being very, very modest in that number, it’s like no Jenn, it’s 75%.

Cherry Lou Sy
I mean, only an artistic mind cannot come up with like the BedStuy Goldfish Aquarium.

Jennifer Baker
You know, everyone has their dreams and everyone has something that makes them brings them so much joy. That brought someone joy.Again, Congrats. Congrats on this book. Future books, all the good things, and I just hope there's time for you to celebrate this into the new year as well. Because it's a it's a

big deal to finish a book. It's huge in the midst of all of this promotion and preparation and anticipation. I know I didn't celebrate. Did you celebrate? Um, you like, take a moment to be like hell yeah!

Cherry Lou Sy
It's a bit hard to celebrate. But, you know, I, I did have, you know, just my book launch, I guess I just took that as the celebration, because there were a lot of people who showed up that I did not expect to be. There a lot of people that I had, oh, this was super sweet. So, I had several of my old students from CUNY show up, some of them I did not even know were coming. Oh, wait before we sign off, you're gonna love this. I have to just talk about the fact that I was super shocked when I found out at Dutton that one of my old students from 10 years ago was the marketing assistant.

Jennifer Baker
Get out!

Cherry Lou Sy
yes, I mean, what are the odds like I get this email. This was when the you know, earlier, like in the spring, I get this email from my editor, you know, she CC the, you know, that's when she was looping in publicity and marketing. Then I see a name. I said, this name, okay, it's not often I see this name because it is super, super unique. I thought, it can't be. Then I get an email from her, and she says, "I don't know if you remember me, but I was your student. You know, when I was in high school 10 years ago." And that really, then she said that the class that I taught really got her into this journey of being in the publishing industry. And I just was crying because…

Jennifer Baker
Oh my god.

Cherry Lou Sy
It was just, I had no idea. I mean, talk about impact, right? So I see, I felt in that moment that, Oh, my God, I am in the right place, the right time, the right journey. Because this was like a seed for that I didn't even know I planted. Do you know what I mean?

Jennifer Baker
Right. Yeah, there is something you cannot quantify, okay?

Cherry Lou Sy
And I just have to shout her out here, because it's her name is super unique, and she's such a wonderful person: Diamond Bridges. Tell me that name is not unique.

Jennifer Baker
I love that name. Diamond Bridges. That is such a beautiful name.

Cherry Lou Sy
Exactly. And so I just, I was so shocked. So, yeah, yeah, I, I guess I'll end it there. You know that you just never know where the impact is going to be.

Jennifer Baker

Yeah, I'm glad you had that moment. Yeah, I'm glad. *Wow.* Is there a way for you to just print that? Did you print that email out?

Cherry Lou Sy
I mean, I have it. I didn't print it out, but I have it. And I was, I thought, because she doesn't live in the city anymore, that I wouldn't get to see her. But she came out specifically to come to the launch I found out the day before. So I was just, I was so elated, you know, so we have pictures together. So I was just, it was special.

Jennifer Baker
That is so wonderful. And shout out to you, Diamonds. I wish you a long and beautiful journey in this industry. Congratulations. That's great. Thank you. I love that story. I want more of those, please.

Cherry Lou Sy
I know it's like.

Jennifer Baker
Give me something, man.

Cherry Lou Sy
Give me a bone here.

Jennifer Baker
Give me a hit of something. Yeah, oh my gosh, Cherry, it has been absolutely wonderful to spend this Sunday with you.

Cherry Lou Sy
Thank you so much, Jenn. This was likewise a great way to spend my Sunday.

Jennifer Baker
Oh yay. And thank you all so much for listening again. Have a great New Year and a safe New Year. Take care. I want to give thanks and acknowledge that this episode was sponsored by Writeability, a nonprofit Writers Guild in defense of the imagination. Thanks again for listening to the minorities in publishing podcast. As a reminder you can find the podcast at minorities in publishing dot com, or on Instagram and Twitter, at minoritiesinpub. And you can sign up for the monthly newsletter. Also feel free to rate the podcast on your listening platform. Take care.

[46:36]