

Booklist

Advanced Review – Uncorrected Proof

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★ **Miles from Nowhere.**

Mun, Nami (Author)

Jan 2009. 304 p. Riverhead, hardcover, \$21.95. (9781594488542).

“My mom turned crazy the night my father left for good,” states Joon, the unflinching 13-year-old narrator in Mun’s explosive first novel. The neglected only child of Korean immigrants soon runs away from her severely depressed mother and their 1980s Bronx home. Finding refuge in a shelter, Joon delicately negotiates a tempestuous alliance with a streetwise girl named Knowledge and a boy hustler called Wink. Pliant, watchful, and quietly courageous, Joon is fascinated by the struggling people she meets, from junkies to sex workers, drunks, thieves, and wackos. But for all the betrayals, beatings, and risky sex she endures; the heroin habit she acquires; and the chaos and terror of homelessness, jail, hunger, precarious jobs, and suicidal interludes, Joon remains inviolable, kind, and determined. Mun’s gritty and empathic coming-of-age tale confronts the madness that lurks on the periphery of lust and love, the poison of racism, the suffering of the unloved, and the fierce survival instincts, adaptability, and radiance of young people. There is nothing simplistic or sensationalized here as Mun, a writer of gravitas, portrays the dispossessed and the cast-out, reminding us how quickly things can go disastrously wrong, how tough it is to live outside the margins.

— *Donna Seaman*