**Miles from Nowhere** by Nami Mun

**Week:** 1 of 3  
**Chapters/Pages:** pp. 1-30  
**Themes:** Homelessness, family relationships, survival, friendships – trust, truth

**Recommended Opening:** “To see clearly and without flinching, without turning away, this is agony, the eyes taped open two inches from the sun.” – Margaret Atwood, *Notes Towards a Poem That Can Never Be Written*. (Epigraph to *Miles from Nowhere*)

- What point is this author trying to make?  
- Do you agree? Why/why not?  
- Why would the author say that “to see clearly and without flinching […] this is agony”? What kinds of things do you think she’s talking about seeing?  
- What is the effect of her describing it as being like having “eyes taped open two inches from the sun”?  
- Why might someone want to “turn away” from something? Why might someone not want to “turn away”?  
- This quote is the epigraph (BGL may need to explain that this is a short quotation at the beginning of a book or text) to *Miles from Nowhere*. Without knowing much about this book, why do you think she chose this quote to start her book? What clues does that give you about this book?

**Before Reading:**
- This is Nami Mun’s debut novel, for which she won several prestigious awards. It is a work of fiction; however, Mun experienced some similar things to those that happen to Joon, the book’s main character.

**Recommended Reading Passages and Questions:**

Read pp. 1-6 (until “All she said was, I’m starving.”):

- What sense do you get of the narrator, Joon, from these first few pages? What kinds of things are important to her? What challenges does she seem to be facing?  
- What do we learn about her life? Her family? How old is she?  
- How do you feel about Joon’s mother’s reaction to her husband leaving? What do you think is going on for her? What do you imagine Joon felt while all this was happening?  
- What do you think her mom means when she says, “What do you think God does to people like you” (5)? Who do you think is the ‘you’ she’s addressing? Why?  
- How would you explain Joon’s comment, “how can you not love someone who lets you see them in all that pain” (5)? Have you ever felt this way about someone? If so, what do you think caused that feeling?  
- What do you think Joon saw or understood when she says “for the first time, I saw her clearly” (5)? What do you think allowed her to see “as if I were inside a dream of hers, watching all her thoughts”? Have you ever had an experience like that? If yes, what was that like? If not, what do you imagine that would be like?

Read pp. 6-13 (until “I got dressed.”):

- What are your first impressions of Knowledge? What do you notice about her relationship with Joon?  
- Knowledge asks Joon if she trusts her. Do you think Joon should trust her? Why/why not? How do you decide whether you can trust a new person in your life?  
- Do you agree or disagree with Knowledge’s comment, “Life’s only as bad as you make it out to be. It’s got nothing to do with the way it is” (6)? Why? What do you think might lead someone to this conclusion? What might lead someone to believe this isn’t true?  
- What do you think Joon means when she says of Knowledge, “I liked watching her like this – I liked that there was nothing between me and her. Not even her” (11)? Why do you think she likes this?  
- How would you describe people’s relationships in the shelter? Do they seem genuine? Why/why not?  
- What do you think Knowledge wants them to go do? Any guesses as to what might happen next?

Read pp. 13-20 (until “This lasted until the day I left.”):

- Why do you think Joon ran away from home? What about Knowledge and Wink? What are some other reasons young people may leave home?
Miles from Nowhere by Nami Mun

- What impression do you have of Wink? What reasons might someone doing sex work? How do people perceive sex work? What do people think about sex workers? What do you think about sex work? Is it work that you think you could do?
- From what we’ve seen so far, what does it seem like it takes to survive in the streets? What qualities do you think someone would need to have to survive? Why?
- Joon gives Knowledge her laces “because it was easier to do what others wanted” (17). What do you think might contribute to her feeling this way? What does this tell you, if anything, about Joon?
- Why do you think Joon pulls down the window to “smell every home” (19)? What do you imagine she is feeling or thinking in this moment?
- What do you think of Joon’s comment that after her father left, she and her mother “ate alone” and “cried alone” (20)? Why do you think this happened? How do you relate to people when dealing with a challenge? Do you like to be alone or around others? Why?

Read pp. 20-30:
- How did you react to discovering what Knowledge’s plan was? Were you surprised that it was Knowledge’s family’s house?
- Why do you think Knowledge wanted to go back there? Why did she want to steal the Christmas tree, in particular?
- How do you imagine Knowledge feels when the man yells at her: “Who the hell would want you? You’re too damn ugly to get anyone else” (27)? How do you think she feels after they leave with the tree?
- What do you think Joon is feeling at the end of this chapter? What does she mean when she says she saw “the tree in front, for exactly what it was” (30)? What is she seeing?
- Knowledge says she and Joon can’t be friends if Joon doesn’t trust her. Do you think you need to trust someone to be their friend? Why/why not? How can you tell whether someone trusts you?
- What do you think is the “difference between getting lost and staying lost” that Joon refers to? What do you make of her explanation about why she “stayed gone”? What would make someone want to “stay lost” or “stay gone” as opposed to just getting lost?

Recommended Poetry: “If I could tell the truth about my life” by Taishiya Nix Bull
- What are your initial thoughts/impressions of the poem? What lines or phrases stood out and why?
- Why do you think Taishiya says that “people would be in awe” if she told the truth about her life? What life events would make you be in awe of someone?
- Why might it be “a cold day in hell” before Taishiya could/would tell her truth?
- Why do you think telling her truth would make her feel “free as a bird”? Have you ever felt freed by telling someone the truth about something?
- Near the end, Taishiya says others “probably wouldn’t want” her to tell the truth about her life. Why do you think that is?
- Taishiya asks, “If I could tell the truth, shit, would you listen?” What does it mean to listen when people tell the truth? Do you feel like you choose to listen when someone tells the truth? Why/why not?
- What truths do you think Taishiya might not be telling? Why do you think she chooses not to tell them?

Recommended Poetry Prompt: “The truth about my life”
Joon talks about “seeing things as they really are,” while Taishiya Nix Bull writes about what would happen if she told the truth of her life. Think about your own truths. What would happen if you shared your truths with the world? How would people respond? What would they discover about you? How would you feel having told?
Write your own piece that either tells those truths or talks about what would happen if you did tell your whole truth. Be creative, using vivid language and details to make your writing come alive!

Recommended Closing: “Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me the truth.” – Henry David Thoreau
Notes: Next week we’ll pick up on page 78