

# *Miles from Nowhere by Nami Mun*

**Week:** 2 of 3

**Chapters/Pages:** pp. 78-92, 93-111

**Themes:** Homelessness, Choices, Friendship, Survival

**Recommended Opening:** “Our greatest power is the power of choice; our greatest freedom lies in the exercise of our power of choice.” – William Curtis

- Do you agree that the power of choice is “our greatest power”? Why or why not? What can you think of that might be a greater power?
- How much power of choice do you have? What things do you have choices about? What things do you not have choices about?
- Can you think of a time where you felt like you didn’t have the power to choose? If so, what was that like?
- Do you think some people have more power of choice than others? If so, why?
- What connection is the writer making between freedom and choice?

## **Summary of Interim Events:**

- Joon is beat and assaulted by a group of men in an alley. A kind older man scares them away by honking at them and tells Joon she’s okay.
- Joon decides to work at an escort club to make just enough money to afford a motel room for the night. Joon ends up with a man who forces her to perform oral sex on him. Afterwards, she quickly leaves the man in the room, collects her money from the cashier and runs out of the club.
- While heading back to the motel, Joon sees Lana, another escort at the club who’d gotten in a fight earlier that night, passed out on a bench. She takes her to the motel and tries to get a room for them to share but the man there charges her more for a guest and she can’t afford it – so she leaves.

## **Recommended Reading Passages and Questions:**

Read pages 78-85 (until “Knowledge had standards.”):

- What more do you learn here about Joon and Knowledge’s relationship? Why do you think Joon says she wants Knowledge’s approval? How do you feel about the influence Knowledge has on Joon?
- How does the story of the bank robbery affect how you view Knowledge, if at all? What does it mean to “have standards,” as Joon claims Knowledge does?
- Why does Knowledge get upset at Joon for talking about wanting to see the Statue of Liberty? What does she mean when she says, “You don’t need to see the Statue of Liberty to know you’re free” (79)?
- What does it mean to be free? Do you think Joon and Knowledge are free? Why/why not?
- What do you think of Knowledge saying, “You can do whatever you want with your life” (79)? How much do your circumstances affect how your life turns out?
- What do you make of Joon’s decision to talk to the woman in the park even though Knowledge tells her not to?
- How did you react to Knowledge running after the thief? Did you expect this? Why/why not? What do you think will happen with this?

Read pp. 85-92:

- What is your reaction to what happens at the end of this scene? Why does Knowledge steal the wallet back? What upset her about the woman trying to offer a reward?
- Why does Knowledge say, “I’m gonna be saved” (89)? What are different ways to read that sentence?
- What does Knowledge mean when she says, “Sometimes you gotta do wrong to do right, know what I’m saying?” (92)? Do you think Joon does understand what she means, as she says she does? Why?
- How does Joon seem to feel about Knowledge during this scene? Does it seem to change at all throughout? Why do you think that?
- Why does Knowledge want to know if the crowd is still there? Why do you think Joon tells Knowledge the crowd is still behind them when it isn’t?

## *Miles from Nowhere by Nami Mun*

- What are the “lessons” Knowledge tries to impart to Joon regarding the encounter? What do you think of her advice to “help *only* strangers. You can’t go around helping all your friends cause they start depending on you and that gets you nowhere...” (88)?
- What does Knowledge say is the difference between personality and character? Do you agree with this? Why/why not?
- How do you imagine Joon and Knowledge’s relationship will look moving forward?

Read pp. 93-97 (until “...anything in the world right then.”):

- What state does Joon seem to be in at this point? How can you tell?
- What makes her decide this man she sees on the bus is God? Why do you think she believes he’s come for her?
- Joon describes how the man stares at her “as if to light me on fire.” What kind of look do you imagine this was? What do you think Joon felt when he looked at her this way? What do you think he meant by it, if anything?
- What do you think this encounter means to Joon? Do you think this scene is real or in her imagination? Why?
- What is the significance of the scene Joon describes with her father? Why do you think she describes it right after describing the scene on the bus?
- Why do you think she says, “I’d loved him more than anything in the world right then,” (97) associated with that earlier memory of her father?
- Joon says she used to think her father was God. Have you ever felt that way about your parents or any other figure in your life? What do you think it would feel like to have that image of your parent changed, like it was for Joon?

Read pp. 97-111:

- Does Joon’s time away from home seem to have changed her at all? If yes, how so? If not, why not?
- Why do Joon and Knowledge get into a fight?
- Joon says she’s been “poisoned” and that caused her to lose her only true friend. What “poison” do you think is she referring to? Why?
- What do you imagine Joon is feeling when Knowledge says, “You ain’t turned out like I taught you” (99)?
- What is your reaction to Joon’s relationship with Philly? How do you think this relationship, and its end, will affect Joon moving forward? Why?
- What is the significance of Joon’s encounter with the girl she thinks is an angel? What do you think has caused Joon to decide that she’s “ready” to be taken and doesn’t “want any more time here” (107)?
- What do you think are some other reasons people decide they want to die? What are some things that help people overcome these feelings?
- What advice would you give Joon right now if you were her friend?
- What do you think will happen to Joon next? Why?

**Recommended Poetry:** “Decisions” by Boris Novak

- What stands out to you as you read this poem?
- Why do you think the poet uses the pairings he does? Which “decisions” seemed most intriguing to you? Most challenging? Easiest?
- Why do you think the poet advises the decisions he does? Are they the same decisions you would make in these instances?
- Why do you think the poem ends by telling us that between hope and despair we should choose hope but that hope “will be harder to bear”?
- Based on the reading from today, do you feel like Joon is choosing hope or despair right now? Why do you think that?

## *Miles from Nowhere by Nami Mun*

### **Recommended Poetry Prompt:** “I Have Decided”

Write about a decision or a choice that you have made recently in your life. How does it feel to have made that decision? How has it affected you, either positively or negatively (or both)? Where do you think this decision will take you? Why did you make it?

You use one of the following phrases to get started, if you want:

When I decided...

My decision was...

### **Recommended Closing:** “Remember” by Joy Harjo

*Notes:* Next week we'll pick up on page 264