

Booklist

Advanced Review – Uncorrected Proof

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★ **Harley Loco: A Memoir of Hard Living, Hair, and Post-Punk, from the Middle East to the Lower East Side.**

Elias, Rayya (Author)

Apr 2013. 300 p. Viking, hardcover, \$26.95. (9780670785162). 305.892.

This is not easy reading. In fact, quite often the author's behavior is so stupidly self-destructive—and blatantly selfish—that one is tempted to give up on her. And yet you read on. As a memoir of darkness and, ultimately, redemption written by a gay ex-junkie, ex-con, musician, hairdresser, and filmmaker, Elias offers a unique literary voice (the title refers to the nickname she was given in Rikers prison). In 1967, at the age of seven, she emigrated from Syria to the U.S. with her family. While growing up in the Detroit area, she was bullied by her American classmates; she felt alienated and like a prisoner in her own skin. But there was one thing that made her feel “tough and cool in people's eyes”: drugs. Hers is a violent and humiliating tale of time in rehab and detox centers and prison stints as well as numerous love affairs with both men and women, followed by eviction after eviction until, homeless, she had no place to go. Elias paints an indelible portrait of New York City, especially the East Village, during the bad old days of the 1980s, when every street corner seemed to be inhabited by hookers and drug dealers. A memoir few readers will soon forget.

— *June Sawyers*