

Emily via the Greyhound Bus

by Allison Kydd

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Reviewed by Dave Williamson

Saskatoon's Thistledown Press regularly introduces emerging writers through their New Leaf Editions series. Allison Kydd's poignant *Emily via the Greyhound Bus* is one of four books that make up Series Eleven.

The cover describes the book as "stories" and there are eleven pieces, each with a title, but you soon realize that this is not a collection of related stories but a cohesive narrative – really a novella in eleven parts. A quick look at the copyright page tells you that this work originally appeared as a serial in Edmonton's *Our Voice*, which is described as a "spare-change newspaper." Kind of heart-warming, in this electronic era, to know that fiction could still be serialized in a print medium, as it was way back in Charles Dickens's day.

Author Kydd takes a risk in the opening pages, introducing her main protagonist in the unglamorous process of vomiting in the toilet of a moving Greyhound bus with a male passenger anxiously rattling the door latch.

Emily, an Aboriginal woman in her late thirties, is heading west. She's left her partner Jeremy in Toronto. She apparently left rather abruptly – she is travelling with only a tote bag.

In straightforward, uncluttered prose, Kydd cleverly interweaves what happens on the journey – both on the bus and at stops along the way – with Emily's thoughts about her past, her girlhood in a rural Saskatchewan reserve and later. A lengthy bus trip would seem to be the perfect setting for self-analysis.

We learn that Emily had her first sex at age 13 with her cousin Travis.

If it weren't for her vanity, she could have been the good girl her mother wanted. Instead, she had been slinky as a cat, tossing her head and letting her bottom sway as she walked.

[Whether she was] innocent or not that first time, there was no excuse for walking with him again, for walks always ended in neighbours' barns, sheds, burned-out cars, or dark patches of bush. (37)

Travis made her pregnant, and her mother forced her to move into a convent school and give up the baby boy for adoption.

And then there was her first real love, when she was living on her own: Marty, whom she met at a pot party. She lived with him for a while and had baby Aaron, and Marty ended up with custody.

Meanwhile, in the present of the novel, she's fending off the rather clumsy advances of a fellow passenger. "Did men think because she was *Indian* she'd be game for anything? . . . Why wouldn't they take 'no' for an answer?" (16)

And later, at night:

She looked outside and saw only snow, plus a few trees craggy and alone-looking against a blue black sky. They were past the rocks and forest now, and she'd forgotten the bleak look of a prairie winter.

Inside wasn't much better – only the dim glow of a few reading lights held back the dark. That fellow Cliff seemed to have moved to the rear of the bus again. She dared not check, in case he saw her and took it as encouragement. (40)

A bus driver whose shift finishes in Winnipeg takes more than a passing interest in her, and, in Moosomin, she gets off the bus to vomit again and the bus leaves without her. As it dawns on her what might be causing the sickness, Emily seems to be at the lowest point in her life, but Allison Kydd convincingly brings the novella to a hopeful conclusion. ♣

Dave Williamson is a Winnipeg writer whose latest book is a comic novel called *Dating*.

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