

And Miles to Go Before I Sleep

Jocelyne Saucier

Rhonda Mullins, Translator

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Jocelyne Saucier's novel *And Miles to Go Before I Sleep* is an enchanting, transit-oriented adventure about the power of human connection.

In a small, drive-by village in Ontario, Gladys leaves her suicidal daughter, her home, and her former life without explanation to embark on a secret trip. The brilliance of her decision captures the attention of the narrator, an English teacher from an also small village that's far away from Gladys; he makes it his duty to understand all there is to know about her. To do so, he travels across Canada, and even across the Atlantic.

The novel's short chapters feature heavy meditation and transit-oriented asides from the narrator. They're structured like a letter or diary, and become as much about the narrator attempting to understand an unknowable truth as he is trying to grasp Gladys's decisions. Although he's denied firsthand experience of her alleged magnetic personality, Gladys's angelic spirit is captured in the dazzling stories of her friends, acquaintances, and even of the train conductor.

The linguistic intricacies and variations of Canadian francophones are preserved, as when the narrator meets a French writer in Paris for potential news, and the text notes that they chose to speak in English due to issues with understanding each other's French. Though such dialogue is sparse, it is precise when it comes to capturing the distinctive spirits of the large cast of characters.

Literary at its core, the novel is rife with metaphors, allegories, symbolism, and parabolic asides that invite long ruminations. It is most concerned with how people rationalize their decisions; multiple interpretations are encouraged through the questions that sprinkle the story's last act.

And Miles to Go Before I Sleep is a slim but complex novel in which a teacher tracks a woman who disappeared.

GEORGE HAJJAR (July / August 2021)

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