



Consumption: A novel

Kevin Patterson

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In Rankin Inlet, a small town bordering the Arctic Ocean, the lives of the Inuit are gradually changing. The caribou and seals are no longer plentiful, and Western commerce has come to the community through a proposed diamond mine. Victoria Robertson wakes to a violent storm, her three children stirring in the dark. Her father, Emo, a legendary hunter who has come in off the land to work in a mine, checks to see if the family is all right. So does her Inuit lover, as Victoria's British husband is away on business.

Thus the reader enters into the modern contradictions of the Arctic—walrus meat and convenience food, midnight sun and 24-hour satellite TV, dog teams and diamond mines—and into the heart of Victoria's internal exile. Born on the tundra in the 1950s, Victoria knows nothing but the nomadic life of the Inuit until, at the age of ten, she is diagnosed with tuberculosis and evacuated to a southern sanitarium. When she returns home six years later, she finds a radically different world, where the traditionally rootless tribes have uneasily congregated in small communities. And Victoria has become a stranger to her family and her culture.

Victoria compounds her marginalization by marrying a non-Inuit, Robertson, the manager of the town store. Over the years, as her children gravitate toward the pop culture of the mainland, and as her husband aggressively exploits the economic opportunities that the Arctic offers, Victoria feels torn between her family and her ancestors, between the communal life of the North and the material life of the "South." Through Victoria, Kevin Patterson deftly exposes the costs and consequences of cultural assimilation, and the emotional toll that such significant lifestyle changes take on communities.

Spanning countries, generations, and cultures, *Consumption* is an epic novel of the Arctic, and a penetrating portrait of generational division and cultural dissonance.

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