



Light in the Darkness

Richard E. Valdez

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A master storyteller weaves a beautiful tale from the age of Native Americans' ancestors.

Light in the Darkness tells the story of Honaw, a Hisatsinom boy who grows to become the spiritual leader of his people. A gifted storyteller, Richard E. Valdez has written a highly entertaining, inspiring novel.

The book opens in 1055 in the San Juan Basin of northern New Mexico and southern Colorado. Through the teachings of his grandfather Kwahu, the Soyala Moiety for the Spider Clan, Honaw learns the spiritual traditions of his people, especially the importance of thinking and acting the right way in order to maintain the balance of all things in the universe. Acting correctly includes sharing work and food to assure everyone's survival, and rejecting the poison of hate. Not all follow these beliefs, however, and a series of calamities befall Honaw's family and people. Over the course of almost two decades, Honaw grows to become the man who leads his people to White House, their most sacred spiritual place, and helps them retain their peaceful, cooperative culture.

Light in the Darkness is a beautiful novel. Written in the style of a Native American folktale, this story could be one that an elder like Kwahu would tell the children around the campfire to teach them about their ancestors and culture. Because Honaw and his people face a variety of challenges that include murder, wolves, flooding, and overpowering greed, this story unfolds in ways that can't be predicted, making it difficult to put down. At the same time, the novel is similar to the ancestor tales in that it instructs. Over and over again, the characters learn the benefits of cooperative, peaceful action and the havoc that ensues after falling into selfishness; *Light in the Darkness* has a message for those living now.

The characters who inhabit the book are memorable. Honaw is a boy upon whom fate thrusts much responsibility. While grieving a death, he fails to act correctly and harms his people seriously, but asks for forgiveness and becomes a great leader. Lansa, Honaw's brother-in-law, embodies great physical strength and gentleness of spirit. Finally, the main female characters of Nova, Kele, and Lenmana each manifest grace, wisdom, and great determination in demanding circumstances.

Valdez is a meticulous author. He provides a glossary with pronunciation key for the various names and terms used throughout the novel. He also provides a bibliography for those who want to learn more about aspects of this novel and about the Hopi, who are descendants of the Hisatsinom. Because this is a work of historical fiction, Valdez also provides a brief author's note, differentiating the factual basis of the novel from his fiction. Finally, the cover art depicting a traditional home and pit house aids in picturing the action of the story.

Richard Valdez is a masterful storyteller, and *Light in the Darkness* is a pleasure to read.

ANNIE PETERS (December 10, 2014)

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