

BOOK CLUB KIT

WOMAN OF LIGHT

KALI FAJARDO-ANSTINE



Dear Reader,

I grew up in Denver, the Rocky Mountains to the west and the sunrise prairie to the east. My world was steeped in family, heritage, and a deep reverence for the storytelling of my ancestors who had migrated from Southern Colorado to Denver during the Great Depression.

There was my glamorous Auntie Lucy, gifted with *the sight*, her snake-charming brother, my great-grandfather Alfonso from the Philippines, and great-grandma Esther who taught me her remedios in her white-walled kitchen. I heard tales of their labor in the sugar beet fields, of the gowns they handmade for the dance halls, and more sinister stories, too. My Auntie Lucy spoke of the Ku Klux Klan's massive influence in Denver, and how as a small girl she would lie against the floorboards of her tenement, hiding from their sight for her safety.

I've always known my heritage to be a nuanced blending of Pueblo Native Americans, Mexican, Filipino, and European ancestors who came together in what is now known as Colorado. For many years, I thought my family story was a rare occurrence in an American society that often demands a people choose one identity, ostensibly erasing so much of our history.

Years ago, while I was writing the first drafts of *Woman of Light*, I visited my great-grandparents' grave on the outskirts of Denver. The cemetery rows were covered in snow and crisp air kicked down from the mountains against my back. "Grandma Esther," I said, "I am writing a book about us, and I hope to make you proud."

I've always known it would be part of my life's work to tell the story of my ancestors, a book that would illuminate the historical tragedies and triumphs of my community. I wanted to subvert the Western genre and to provide a space for Indigenous, Latinx, and multicultural characters based on my own ancestors to thrive in literature.

I am so excited for you to meet Luz, Diego, Maria Josie, and Lizette, and I hope you feel transported through space and time into the 1930s and beyond. I wrote these characters, and their stories, with immense love.

Warmly,
Kali Fajardo-Anstine



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the significance of the novel's title, *Woman of Light*. What role does light play in the book?
2. Which character was your favorite, and why?
3. How does the novel address the importance of storytelling? How do you think we inherit the stories of our ancestors and what power do they hold over us? If you are comfortable with it, share a story about one of your ancestors and discuss the ways it influenced your life.
4. Kali Fajardo-Anstine writes, "Sometimes men were like that, treating a girl's voice as if it had slipped from her mouth and fallen directly into a pit." How does the author give the women of this novel a voice?
5. Discuss the novel's visual imagery, from the landscape to the characters' clothing. How does the author bring the setting to life?
6. How is *Woman of Light* a new narrative of the American West? How does it compare to older, more textbook literature in this canon?
7. Fajardo-Anstine writes of Pidre, "He couldn't help but think that Anglos were perhaps the most dangerous storytellers of all—for they believed only their own words, and they allowed their stories to trample the truths of nearly every other man on Earth." How does *Woman of Light* recenter Indigenous Chicano storytelling? Why do you think that's important? Did reading this novel make you want to seek out other voices that have been sidelined throughout history—and literary history? Explain.
8. There are several fantastic elements to the novel, like a clairvoyant tea-leaf reader. Why do you think the author decided to include these elements, and how did they enhance the story?
9. "School doesn't make you smart, Luz," Ethel tells her. "It's just a type of training. Real intelligence—that comes from our grit, our ability to read the world around us." Do you agree? Why or why not?
10. The novel's timeline shifts as Luz has visions about her ancestors, and as Fajardo-Anstine reveals more to the reader about the past. How did these shifts affect your reading experience? What does *Woman of Light* have to say about the passing of time, and how things do and do not change?
11. "Luz felt partly made of mountains," Fajardo-Anstine writes, "as if the land was family." Discuss this quotation, and the role that land—and ownership—play in the novel. Consider things like the names of towns, and both official and "unofficial" claims of ownership.
12. What messages do you think Fajardo-Anstine was sending about the themes of family, legacy, and land? How did you feel when you finished the book?



MEET THE CHARACTERS

DESIDERYA • 1ST GENERATION

Also known as The Sleepy Prophet of Pardona Pueblo, Desiderya can recount a thousand years' worth of visions, but her output is unsteady. She raises Pidre as her grandson after she finds him abandoned along a creek.

PIDRE • 2ND GENERATION

Pidre is found as a baby and raised as a grandson by the Sleepy Prophet. A gifted storyteller, he leaves the Land of Early Sky to seek success in the white man's world as a theater owner with a troupe of performers.

SIMODECEA • 2ND GENERATION

A talented sharpshooter who accidentally killed the love of her life, Simodecea finds new love in Pidre, and their two daughters, Sara and Marie Josefina.

SARA • 3RD GENERATION

The eldest daughter of Pidre and Simodecea, Sara is born with clairvoyance, but her life is marked by sorrows that she tries to push away until forgotten. She gives birth to a boy named Diego and his little sister, Luz.

MARIA JOSEFINA 3RD GENERATION

The youngest daughter of Pidre and Simodecea, Maria Josie, as she's known in the city, finds a new life in Denver. There, she raises Luz and Diego as if they were her own after her sister Sara decides she can no longer care for them.

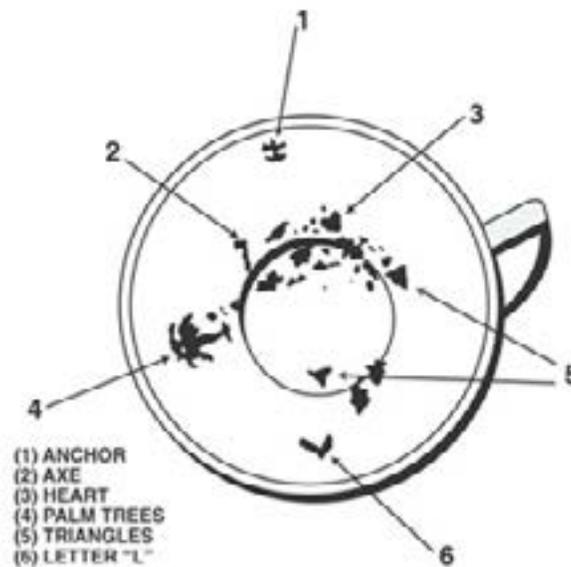
LUZ • 4TH GENERATION

At 17 years old, Luz "Little Light" Lopez is a tea leaf reader, laundress, and seer, making her way in 1930s Denver when she starts having visions of her ancestors. She lives with her Auntie Marie Josie and her brother Diego.

DIEGO • 4TH GENERATION

Luz's older brother Diego is a charmer of snakes and . . . women—until a tragedy forces him to leave home. He travels the American West as a migrant farm worker all while missing his pet snakes, Reina and Corporal.

THE TEA READING TASSEOGRAPHY



THE RITUAL

Put a pinch of tea leaves in the cup, pour boiling water over them, and allow it to stand for about three minutes. Drink the contents of the cup, leaving tea leaves and a very small amount of liquid in the bottom.

The person whose fortune is to be told, called the “sitter” or “consultant,” should then take the cup by the handle in the left hand, rim upwards, and move it in a circle rapidly three times from left to right. Some of the tea leaves will seem to cling to the sides of the cup while others remain in the bottom. Next, slowly invert the cup over the saucer and leave it there until all liquid drains away.

The sitter should approach the oracle with solemn seriousness, and during the ritual should concentrate on his or her future destiny and “wish” that the symbol shall correctly represent happenings to come.

The cup is divided into three parts. The rim designates the present; the side, events not far distant; and the bottom the distant future. The nearer the symbols appear to the handle the nearer the events foretold will be to fulfillment.



THE READING

Now the seer receives the cup from the sitter and proceeds to tell his or her fortune, unless of course one is to tell one's own fortune. The seer should concentrate upon the cup and upon the consultant. The seer will observe that the tea leaves are scattered over the cup in apparent confusion, but it will be noted after concentration that they form lines, circles, dots, small groups, and figures.

Note carefully the shapes and figures assumed by the leaves. Turn the cup and view the leaves from different angles until the symbols become clear. Be patient and search carefully for symbols and not their position. The more you search the clearer they become. Note the resemblance to various objects, and their relation to each other. Sometimes bad omens will be offset by good ones; good ones may be strengthened or weakened by others, good or evil, and so on.

Observe the complete picture as a whole, as well as individual symbols, for often bad omens may outweigh good ones or vice versa. One large distinct good omen may outweigh several smaller hazy bad omens. Good and bad should be balanced against each other in determining the forecast.



ACORN: Continued health, improved health



PALM TREE: Good omen. Success in any undertaking. Single people learn of marriage.



ANCHOR: Lucky symbol. Success in business or in love. If blurred or indistinct, it means the reverse.



MOON (crescent): Prosperity, fame. If cloudy, difficulties will be solved.



HEART: A lover. If close to a ring, marriage to the present lover. If indistinct, the lover is fickle.



ELEPHANT: Good Luck, good health, happiness



HEAVENLY BODIES (Sun, Moon, Star): Good luck—great happiness and success



TRIANGLES: Unexpected good fortune



OWL: Indicates sickness or poverty. Warning against starting a new venture.



BIRDS: Good luck. If flying, good news from the direction it comes. If at rest, a fortunate journey.



EXPLORE MORE HISTORY – REFERENCE GUIDE

Check out the links below to learn more about the historical events that inspired *Woman of Light*.



[America's Forgotten History of Mexican-American 'Repatriation'](#)

[The San Luis Valley, Spanish and Indigenous Influence on Colorado](#)

[The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo](#)

[The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan in Denver](#)

[The Colorado Lynching of Preston John Porter, Jr.](#)

[Redlining and Denver Housing](#)

[The Maestas Case and Desegregation in Colorado Schools, 1914](#)

[Dearfield, Colorado: An All-Black Settlement Founded in 1910](#)

[Chicanx History and Denver's Westside](#)

[The Colorado Radium Boom](#)

[The Sand Creek Massacre](#)

[Colorado Coalfield War](#)

[Ludlow Massacre](#)

