

I Swallow Turquoise for Courage



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kaidA-daaa jini. The stories begin. In poems that exude the warmth of an afternoon in the southwestern sun, Hershman John draws readers into a world both familiar and utterly new. Raised on a reservation and in boarding schools, then educated at a state university, John writes as a contemporary Navajo poet. His is a new voice, one that understands life on both sides of the canyon that divides, but does not completely separate, the DinA(c) people from their neighbors who live outside the reservation. His poetry draws freely from tribal myths and legends, and like its creator, it lives outside the reservation too. Perhaps that is why they seem so unspoiled, so sparkling. They are like gemstones that we have never seen. And we are dazzled. With their recurring images of sheep, coyotes, and crows and an ever-present Navajo grandmother, these poems carry echoes of an ancient time that seems to exist in parallel with our own. The people who live in them bear, as if woven strand by strand into their souls, the culture and traditions of the Glittering World. Although these poems are lush with imagery of sunbaked lands, they are never sentimental. Throughout this collection, the poet's voice is confident, assured, and engaged with life in a messy world. It is a world in which animated spirits dwell comfortably with modern machinery, where the spiritual resides with the all-too-human. This is a welcoming universe. It invites us to enter, to linger, to savor, and to learn.

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