



Geronimo After Kas-ki-yeh: Poems

Rawdon Tomlinson

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Rawdon Tomlinson's *Geronimo After Kas-ki-yeh* tells the story of the famous Chiricahua Apache war shaman who, after his family is massacred by Mexicans in 1851, makes revenge the driving force of his life. The Chiricahua suffer loss of genocidal proportions. In later years, Geronimo suffers a recurring nightmare of his people dying like a sun, never to rise again. The ordinary and extraordinary events of his life and those of his tribe unfold from Mexico and the Arizona Territory in the Southwest to Florida, Alabama, and finally Oklahoma, where the dwindling tribe is held in captivity until 1913. As a prisoner of war, the legendary shaman once feared by Mexicans and Americans alike takes on such mundane duties as tending crops and cleaning house for his sick wife. Though he never gives up his native religion, he supplements it with Christianity and even teaches Sunday school ("I don't think I'm an Indian anymore"). Eventually he becomes a showman-traveling to expositions, riding in rodeos and parades, hawking autographs. On his deathbed he imagines that "Heaven is endless bullets and Mexicans." Woven into this disturbing yet poignant chronicle are threads of the Chiricahua Life-Way, with its emphasis on family, its humor, its spiritual strength, and its ability to meet hardship with courage. Tomlinson's moving collection-bolstered throughout by remarkable historical accuracy-is a meditation on the meaning of family, a cultural identity suppressed, the consuming desire for vengeance, and the theft of human dignity.

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