Happy Land

by Dolen Perkins-Valdez



About the Book

A woman learns the incredible story of a real-life American Kingdom --- and her family?s ties to it --- in this enthralling new novel from the *New York Times* bestselling and NAACP Image Award-winning author of TAKE MY HAND.

Nikki hasn?t seen her grandmother in years. So when the elder calls out of the blue with an urgent request for Nikki to visit her in the hills of western North Carolina, Nikki hesitates only for a moment. After years of silence in her family, due to a mysterious estrangement between her mother and grandmother, she?s determined to learn the truth while she still can.

But instead of answers about the recent past, Mother Rita tells Nikki an incredible story of a kingdom on this very mountain, and of her great-great-great grandmother, Luella, who would become its queen.

It sounds like the makings of a fairy tale --- royalty among a community of freed people. But the more Nikki learns about the Kingdom of the Happy Land, and the lives of those who dwelled in the ruins she discovers in the woods, the more she realizes how much of her identity and her family?s secrets are wrapped up in these hills. Because this land is their legacy, and it will be up to her to protect it before it, like so much else, is stolen away.

Inspired by true events, HAPPY LAND is a transporting multi-generational novel about the stories that shape us and the dazzling courage it takes to dream.

Discussion Guide

1. The author based this novel on the real-life Kingdom of the Happy Land. Prior to reading this novel, what did you know about the Kingdom of the Happy Land? Were you aware that such a kingdom existed?

2. What is the significance of using terms such as kingdom and royalty to describe the land and its people?

3. How would you describe the connection between the kingdomfolk and their land?

4. The attorney informs Nikki that the law is not on their side and it is unlikely that Mother Rita will get the land back. However, Mother Rita doesn?t believe that. Why do you think she is so certain?

5. When William returns to Luella and moves into the palace, Luella juggles two husbands and feels powerless. Do you agree with her decision to let William stay? Was there something else she could have done instead?

6. When Mr. Weaver refuses to honor his promise to sell the land back to the Kingdom at the agreed-upon price, Luella decides to purchase only a portion of the land back. How do you feel about her decision? Do you agree with it?

7. Throughout the novel, Nikki wonders about the source of the deep rift between her mother and Mother Rita. Do you think they are able to completely heal their relationship by the end of the book?

8. Nikki feels dissatisfied with nearly every aspect of her life in D.C. and is uncertain about what to do next. How did you feel when Mother Rita gave her the gift of a new life at the end of the book?

9. Do you notice any similarities in the personalities of the Lovejoy and Montgomery women? In particular, what are the similarities and parallels between Nikki and Luella?

10. This novel emphasizes the importance of community, family and legacy and maintaining our connections with each of them. How is this reflected in the story of the Lovejoy women? Is this applicable to your own life? How?

11. The concepts of land ownership and land loss are central to this story. How do you think the impact of land loss still reverberates through today?s society? What might be done to address it?

Author Bio

Dolen Perkins-Valdez is the *New York Times* bestselling author of TAKE MY HAND (2022), which was awarded an NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Literary Work, a Silver Gavel Award from the American Bar Association, and a Fiction award from the Black Caucus American Library Association, and was long-listed for the Mark Twain American Voice in Literature Award. A three-time nominee for a United States Artists Fellowship, Dolen is widely considered a preeminent chronicler of American historical life.

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