



In Perfect Light

Benjamin Alire Sáenz

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From award-winning poet Benjamin Alire Sáenz comes *In Perfect Light*, a haunting novel depicting the cruelties of cultural displacement and the resilience of those who are left in its aftermath.

In Perfect Light is the story of two strong-willed people who are forever altered by a single tragedy. After Andés Segovia's parents are killed in a car accident when he is still a young boy, his older brother decides to steal the family away to Juárez, Mexico. That decision, made with the best intentions, sets into motion the unraveling of an American family.

Years later, his family destroyed, Andés is left to make sense of the chaos -- but he is ill-equipped to make sense of his life. He begins a dark journey toward self-destruction, his talent and brilliance brought down by the weight of a burden too frightening and maddening to bear alone. The manifestation of this frustration is a singular rage that finds an outlet in a dark and seedy El Paso bar -- leading him improbably to Grace Delgado.

Recently confronted with her own sense of isolation and mortality, Grace is an unlikely angel, a therapist who agrees to treat Andés after he is arrested in the United States. The two are suspicious of each other, yet they slowly arrive at a tentative working relationship that allows each of them to examine his and her own fragile and damaged past. Andés begins to confront what lies behind his own violence, and Grace begins to understand how she has contributed to her own self-exile and isolation. What begins as an intriguing favor to a friend becomes Grace's lifeline -- even as secrets surrounding the death of Andés' parents threaten to strain the connection irreparably.

With the urgent, unflinching vision of a true storyteller and the precise, arresting language of a poet, Sáenz's *In Perfect Light* bears witness to the cruelty of circumstance and, more than offering escape, the novel offers the possibility of salvation.

In Perfect Light Details

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Author : Benjamin Alire Sáenz

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From Reader Review In Perfect Light for online ebook

juan carlos says

OJO: Este libro es un poco dificil de leer por su estilo narrativo, pero una vez que ubicas las voces narrativas, se vuelve adictivo y desgarrador.

¿PARA QUÉ LEER EN EL TIEMPO DE LA LUZ?

1. Por que es un libro que muestra lo cruel de la vida, donde los traumas y rencores de la infancia pueden influir en nuestro comportamiento de adultos.
2. Te muestra perfectamente los matices del destino entre sombríos y luces cegadoras.
3. Los temas referentes a la prostitución infantil, los trasvestis, el abuso sexual, violencia y familias disfuncionales son tocados con una delicadeza por el autor, sin dejar de lado el punto critico y el dolor que desencadenan estos problemas sociales.
4. Los personajes son bien descritos y actúan conforme sus circunstancias de vida, lo cual hacen que la historia sea objetiva y coherente.
5. El autor no se tienta el corazón y mata de unas maneras tan frías y desgarradoras a sus personajes, que te dejaran un hueco en el pecho.
6. El final, que final, tan más redondo, tan más triste y lleno de luz.

TODOS VIVIMOS EN EL TIEMPO DE LA LUZ, SIN EMBARGO LAS SOMBRAS ESTÁN SIEMPRE PRESENTES.

Sabrina says

"That was the problem with the world - it never stayed quiet long enough to listen."

Why do you keep doing this to me, Ben?

Why are your words always so painful and beautiful at the same time?

Fabian says

Unputdownable, the structure of this novel makes it somehow easier to digest. The theme: Nowhere Man is the product of an insensitive atmosphere. Yeah, sometimes a tad "Lifetime"y, this novel tells about two souls living in the borderland I call home: each one is full-fleshed and fully-realised. It is clear that the author invested an infinitesimal amount of time figuring out who they are and what they want. The depictions of violence, not altogether something fictional in El Paso/Juarez, and the realism that this place actually exists dammit...just the mere fact that places like Ascarate and Mesa St. and Dolce Vita Coffeehouse (even, I guess, fucking Chico's Takz) are given swift but realistic visits...well, that makes it particularly relevant to me, to anyone who knows Saenz, to any El Pasoan.

Mari says

I talked about this book in my Hispanic Heritage Reads wrap-up video.

I stayed up past my bedtime to read the last 50% of this book and I'm pretty sure there were tears for most of that time. This was not an easy book to read for me and part of the reason I just sat down and finished it off was because prolonging it was making me "dread" the reading experience. I kept thinking, "oh no! Sad things are going to happen!" I know, weird. And still I gave it five stars because this is a beautifully written story.

There are multiple threads here but the story centers around Andres Segovia, a man struggling so much with his rage that he lashes out twice in the beginning chapters of the story. The story tells us in bits and pieces why Andy carries around that rage and what has happened in his life, starting with the death of both his parents when he was just 10 years old. It never got easier for Andres from that moment. Never got easier than being orphaned. We hear the bits of his story as he relives them or tells them to his lawyer Dave (who we learn is more connected to Andres than we realize at first) and his therapist Grace (who is a widow and dealing with a new diagnosis). We also meet Grace's son, Mister, who is trying to adopt a little boy who happens to be blind.

I don't know if I've mentioned yet but it's a devastating story. The prose, though, was fluid and effortless and lyrical, but in an understated way. It isn't that Alire Saenz is particularly flowery, but just that his words seem like they all fit perfectly. His words flow and speak so much truth into this devastating story. Anything more sensational or less thoughtful or less grounded in human experiences would've come off as tragedy porn. This was devastating (have I said that yet?) because it was too real.

I love, love the way the prose was set-up. We followed around the four characters and got their points of view, but every once in a while, there was this piece of omniscient text that placed everyone within a stretch of time. Something like, as Andy left the bar, Grace was with her Doctor and Mister was kissing his wife and Dave was in the courtroom. It just gave you such a sense of the whole story with all of its moving parts. It was a lovely way to tie everything together and anchor it down in specific times.

This book definitely explores some difficult topics including sexual assault, child molestation, child abuse, terminal illness and drug abuse. I would proceed with caution if need be.

Philip says

In my top of most heartbreakers of works that managed to still build my faith in what can be humane within the inhumanity.

Isis says

I cried sad tears. I cried happy tears.

I swear, one day, Benjamin Alire Saenz will be the death of me.

Going into this, I wasn't exactly sure what to expect. Benjamin Alire Saenz is my favorite author. I've read most of his novels, short stories, and poetry. I keep coming back to his writing looking for heartfelt stories with realistic characters going through real-life issues, and he always delivers. Another important factor about his stories is that they always revolve around Mexican-American people, and that is incredibly significant to me, as a Mexican woman. Still, some of his previous works have not really impressed me, such as Sammy and Juliana in Hollywood and He Forgot to Say Goodbye. These are the last novels I'd read by him, and I figured maybe I wouldn't be able to connect with his older works as much as I have with his newer ones, such as Everything Begins and Ends at the Kentucky Club and Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe. **I was wrong.**

In Perfect Light is one of the most beautiful, carefully crafted works of fiction I have ever had the pleasure of reading. This story is painful, so painful, but so worth the pain. I've noticed this trend in Saenz's novels, that of sorrowful journeys leading to a hopeful, brighter ending, and that is just what this one offered. I love these type of stories the most.

"Maybe it's better if people think you're stupid or slow. They don't expect anything. I live in a world that doesn't expect anything of me because it's already decided I don't matter."

We follow the very different lives of Andres and Grace. The former is a young man who keeps getting into trouble with the law, and who carries the weight of a terrible past on his shoulders. And the latter is a woman who struggles to show her affection to her son, and debates on the right choice to make regarding her new circumstances. Both of these characters come together through counseling, and we learn about both of their heartache.

I wasn't kidding when I said I cried. At one point, this book seriously took my breath away. Everything that happened took me by surprise, and it felt like it was happening to real people I cared about. I wanted to reach into the pages and make things better for everyone. I couldn't believe how much Saenz managed to hurt these poor characters, but it never got to be that bad. I usually hate sad books, but this wasn't just another sad story. This felt genuine. The hardships shown were not in vain, they were there for a reason, and the conclusion was worth getting to.

"He walked into his apartment, opened a window, and looked out into the night. He remembered the boy who used to count stars."

I could sit here and praise Saenz, praise this book and every single word written in it, but I have no further words to describe how much I loved it, and how much it means to me. I think everyone could take something from this novel.

Fadzlishah Johanabas says

I fell in love with Benjamin Alire Saenz's writing when I was reading *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*. Not after. During. What I did after was look for more books from Mr Saenz. Unfortunately, Kinokuniya only carried another title, *Last Night I Sang to the Monster*. I had to buy other books through Amazon.com.

I love technology.

In Perfect Light arrived a little worse for wear, with dented and creased edges, brownish discoloration of the pages, and a black marker mark at the bottom. It's the first paperback edition, printed in 2008 (the hardcover was first published in 2005). I've had it for a couple of years now, I think, but only came around to reading it last Sunday. And I finished it in one night.

I love the book.

Specifically, I love the story. Mr Saenz is a brilliant storyteller. Having read several novels and a book of poem of his, I appreciate the recurring themes he employs in his writing. He conveys the harsh beauty of the desert and El Paso, Texas. He brings to light perspectives and characters that are inherently *Mexican*, the pain of life as harsh as the desert. The pain that only he can tell, the way he tells it.

In Perfect Light tells the story of twenty-six-year-old Andres Segovia who, because of his past (which unravels as the book progresses), has lost his drive to live. He's not suicidal, but living for him means getting through the day, pushing everyone away. The book also tells the stories of three main supporting characters, Dave Duncan, who is Andres's lawyer and guardian angel, Grace Delgado, a therapist who has helped Dave before, and now is recruited to help Andres, and Mister Delgado, Grace's son who, despite not having any direct contact with Andres, plays a pivotal role in helping the story reach its end.

In Perfect Light is, despite its name, far from perfect. There are short chapters, interludes, that are told in the present tense, that show a glimpse of all four main characters at that very same moment. These interludes take getting used to, and they distract readers (well, me at least) from the story. There are parts where we jump into one character's head for a short dialog-paragraph when the section is told in another's perspective. There are long-winded sentences that have no punctuation marks. There are conversations in Mexican that are not translated into English and at times can alienate readers who do not understand the language. The prose itself, when compared to the elegance that is *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*, feels clumsy. The beat, the lyrical arrangement, the signature storytelling are all there, but less refined. Perhaps the reason is that *In Perfect Light* was written years before *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*. Perhaps this book was written this way for an adult audience, and the other was made more minimalist for its target young adult audience. The magic that Mr Saenz offers in his works is still there, just not as brilliant as I expect of him.

That said, the story itself makes up for more than the clunky prose. There is pain in this book, pain that transcends written words, transcends fiction. Andres's pain, his past and his present, it feels real. It is real. Andres is not a character out of a book, but a young man who has been through so much hurt, it's a miracle he's still a whole person. Andres's character and past are similar to Zach's in *Last Night I Sang to the Monster*, and like other main characters in Mr Saenz's other books, has an affinity toward poetry and the

beauty of the desert. Despite his harsh upbringing, Andres has an unquenchable thirst for books and learning, and this thirst makes him stand out, and saves his life.

All four main characters in this book are fully fleshed out, and feel absolutely real, but it is Andres that pulls us in. It is his past that brings us to tears, and it is his pain that makes us want to reach out to him. Even though it has been several days since I finished reading the book, I still think about Andres. I want to buy him lunch and just hang out with him. I want to show him that I'm there for him, whenever he's ready to reach out to others. I want to sit beside him as he leans back against the wall, a lit cigarette in one hand, and a crumpled piece of paper with a poem he's written in the other. I want to hug him and tell him that everything will be all right. I don't know if anything will be, but I want to tell him that.

I wish I were half as good a writer as Mr Saenz is. I wish I can have that effect on others, that they want to hang out with the characters in my stories, that they want to hug them and tell them that everything will be all right.

For me, this book is not about the technique or the poetry in the prose or the storytelling. I can talk about the plot, but I want you to experience it yourself. This book is about evoking a raw urge to protect children from the ugliness in the world, and if that is too late, help them see the beauty the world still has to offer. It's about realizing the depth of a person's resilience, and the strength of one's spirit.

It's about Andres Segovia, who, despite being a fictional character, feels so real that I hope one day he'll read this, and know that there is still beauty in the world. There are still things that can be seen in perfect light.

To all the Andres Segovias out there, I don't know how, I don't know when, but things will be all right.

Never lose hope.

Taylor says

I really liked the tragedy because sadness consumes us all.

Vanesa Rodríguez says

No ha sido una lectura fácil, más bien claustrofóbica. Duele mucho lo que narra el autor desde las distintas perspectivas de los personajes que rodean a Andrés. Andrés es el protagonista y su historia es dolorosamente realista. Sus conversaciones con Grace, su psicóloga y poco a poco su amiga, hará que se enfrente a su pasado. A la vez conoceremos mejor a Grace y a su familia, que nos robará el corazón por su fuerza y su voluntad. Hay otros personajes como Dave, el abogado de Andrés o Mister, el hijo de Grace.

Me ha costado leer esta novela porque trata de temas muy duros como la prostitución infantil, la pederastia, de los abusos, la muerte,... pero sobre todo de los supervivientes y sus heridas.

Un libro difícil, que me ha emocionado, enfadado y que me costará olvidar.

Noura says

// Trigger warnings in this book: rape, abuse, pedophilia, depression, loss //

2.5

It pains me to give a book by Benjamin Alire Sáenz this rating but here I am anyway. Sáenz said this was his best book and I understand why.

But I couldn't get past how the transitions were rough and that there were too many things happenings with no real 'focal' point. & while I enjoyed the ending that had me at the edge of my seat at work (literally) and blinking away tears, it was too rushed and scattered to have the effect intended.

Fiona says

Uhm.

So.

THIS BOOK DESTROYED ME.

I really don't quite know how to articulate what beautiful a story this is.

It's been a long time since a book has had such an emotional impact on me. So I thought I'd at least try to type some words about this wonderful, wonderful book.

"In Perfect Light" tells the story of Andrés Segovia, a young man burdened by the memories of his past, trapped inbetween remembering and forgetting, and Grace Delgado, a therapist, who has lost a husband, is struggling to love a son and is confronted by another death, this time her own. And you will find in this book the story of how Grace and André's lifes intertwine in the best possible ways.

It is also, for me at least, very much a story about hope, about moving towards the light (or, to use a Sam word, being phototactic).

IT'S SO DAMNED GOOD.

How can a book show the worst of humanity (I mean feature the absolute worst !!! scumbags !!! walking !! this earth!!) and yet also manage to show how much light this world holds?

The characters of André Segovia and Grace Delgado have robbed a piece of my heart and I doubt that'll change anytime soon.

And one last thing, just because it needs to be said. Andrés Segovia: you have a beautiful heart.

*****5 stars, but really, all the stars in the universe*****

[Sam talking to Grace about baby Mister]

"He likes to laugh. He doesn't fight me, Grace. He just, well, he just sort of leans into me. He's photo tactic."

"Photo tactic? Is that a Sam word?" It had to be a Sam word. He loved photo words.

"Of course it is. He's like a sunflower, Grace. He leans into me as if I were the source of all light."

?For years I dreamed your eyes as black as night
I long to see your face in perfect light.?

hanna says

Epic

Jennifer says

Saenz makes me cry.

He is a poet, who writes about beauty and truth and love. His characters are broken and fragile and beautiful of spirit. He writes of heartbreak, healing and hope, always leaving us with hope fluttering fragilely in the final pages of his novels. He takes us on a journey of suffering and rendition, which we know will end in light.

In this story, though, Saenz is a painter; he concentrates on light and shadow, and his characters notice things and people and their changing appearances in light and greyness. They are creatures who stretch toward the sunlight, thriving when it is kind, wilting when too harsh; and dying in dark corners for the want of it.

Most of Saenz' characters in the books that I have read so far are abused and frightened and vulnerable and despairing, and replete with the unrestrained brutal beauty of the human spirit. He does not flinch at describing the origins of the horror they carry around with them, trying to escape it but unable to take the steps to trust another person, which is their only hope for healing. Saenz' wise drawing of character in tragedy teaches us the meaning of existence. When his characters are coaxed to take a step towards life or to love another, it is a thing of precious beauty which reads like clear water to one parched in the dessert.

Liz Janet says

When I read this book, I had already read Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe and Last Night I Sang to the Monster, so I knew how he could play with emotions, but I was not prepared for the pain this caused.

Now here there are three things this book did right:

1-Mister, his character was adorable, so nice, kind, forgivable, and I just want to cuddle him, and so will you.

2-The representation of transgender characters was brilliant, as well as the underlying theme of the U.S.-Mexico border. I did not know that things were that way, the prostitution, rape, poverty, murders.

3- The lyrical way he writes, so beautiful that you dream of a happy ending.

So read this whether or not you are a fan of Benjamin Alire Sáenz, because the message here is beautifully clear.

Jo says

No me conmovió ni un poquito. Tiene un montón de POVs que tardan mucho en conectar y el relato es muuuuy pausado.
