

★ **Night of the Living Rez**

Morgan Talty

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The discerning, masterful short stories in Morgan Talty's *Night of the Living Rez* follow a Native community in Maine with power and precision.

David, a Penobscot boy who grows up in a dysfunctional family on an isolated island reservation, narrates. His voice is knowing and weary: he describes a “warped” world wherein “something is off balance that will never be balanced again.” His linked stories observe as an elderly woman with dementia mistakes her grandson for her dead brother; as a boy obsesses about his treasured collection of toy men, stored in a plastic tub; as a part-time medicine man and a mother spend their days watching television and drinking wine from a box; as a young man steals Native artifacts to sell on Antique Road Show; and as classmates bond over cigarettes, cheap beer, and methadone.

Haunting details capture the restlessness of David's world. When he's ten, he hides in the woods while his sister's newborn dies in his arms; he temporarily loses his vision by staring into the sun, distracted by science lessons about the sun exploding and swallowing the Earth. In another tale, David, now older, drives a friend home after electroconvulsive therapy; he fights nausea from the stench of a road “slick with caterpillar guts” that smelled of “bait, of something chewed up and spit out or even shit out.” In a rare glimmer of comfort, David's mother assures him that “Every morning's deformed...but you have to find your footing, your own balance.” Such fleeting moments of affection, however, do little to inspire his hope; his angst is staggering.

Night of the Living Rez is bleak and raw in depicting David's experiences—but his brilliant, chiseled stories still demand attention, demonstrating the urgency of telling the truth.

KRISTEN RABE (July / August 2022)

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