



Let the Dead Bury Their Dead

Randall Kenan

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Set in North Carolina, these are stories about blacks and whites, young and old, rural and sophisticated, the real and fantastical. Named a New York Times Notable Book of the Year, nominated for the 1992 National Book Critics Circle Award, and given the Lambda Award.

Let the Dead Bury Their Dead Details

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Author : Randall Kenan

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From Reader Review Let the Dead Bury Their Dead for online ebook

Toshio says

We read this amazing collection of stories in Peter Orner's Art of Short Fiction class. It's interesting to read this after reading Faulkner...they both create these incredible towns and counties populated by people so real you can taste their sweat.

As an interesting aside, Peter ran into Randall Kenan a couple months back and informed him that we were reading his book along with Dubliners by James Joyce. Kenan was floored. Flattered, but floored.

Nikki says

Randall Kenan is a hell of a storyteller. I love the way he interweaves magical realism throughout his stories. I love the way he uses dialogue to add dimension and energy. I love the way he braids the character of this small town community through each of the plots. As a writer, I truly learned some awesome things about the craft from this fine author. I highly recommend for the serious scribe.

Emily says

I really liked this collection. It was just the sort of folksy Southern fiction I was in the mood to read. My only complaint is that I felt the collection should have been a bit shorter. A few of the stories could have been taken out, and it wouldn't have been much of a loss.

Sidik Fofana says

SIX WORD REVIEW: "Clarence and the Dead"-whoop boy.

Jamal says

Very edgy!!! Against the grain in every way possible and I loved it! Randall has a gem here

Catherine says

I saw him read a few months ago, and he was wonderful. An excellent reading voice. I'd never heard of him before, but after reading this collection of stories, I know he is someone to watch. The stories all take place in the fictional Tims Creek, NC, and they're a mixture of fiction and folk tale and myth. Really rich storytelling.

Kevin Wilkinson says

This has become one of my favorite books of all time! "Let the Dead Bury Their Dead" by Randall Kenan is a collection of short stories that are set in a rural town in North Carolina. Issues of race, religion, family, and sexuality arise in the book and how relationships between each person have affected their past and their future.

I loved this book because of the well-developed characterization. All of Kenan's major characters were round, three-dimensional and polarizing. Kenan also manipulates the writer's voice by constantly changing the POV and the format of the story...something within the same story. This book gives a writing student a broad spectrum of the uses of voice. He also relies on folksy, Southern language that emanates throughout the stories..no matter the character or plot. The lesson that I took away from this book in terms of writing is that a good writer explores the boundaries of voice. He or she crafts a story and tells it however they see fit...an independent writer. If I can get my students to value the independence in writing, then this book would be a great guide for their future writing.

Jess says

There are books you just aren't prepared to love, and this was one of them. I was assigned this for class and started reading it around midterms week--the weather was cold, everyone was getting the flu, and I just wanted to curl up in a ball in my dorm and watch *The West Wing* on Netflix for three days straight. But I had to start reading for class, so I settled unhappily into a library chair and got to work on Randall Kenan's *Let the Dead Bury Their Dead*.

Tim's Creek is a lot more interesting a place to spend an entire multi-character story in than Winesburg, Ohio, that's for sure. There were no characters who seemed out of place, no characters who seemed like their stories didn't need to be told. And of course, Tim's Creek has some magic underneath its history, which brings everything to the next level. We figure out right away from the first chapter--"Clarence and the Dead," about a little boy who can read minds and see the future--that Tim's Creek is a normal town with normal people who go through some not-so-normal things. Kenan's perspective as a gay black man brings more levels of storytelling, branching out from Southern traditions of family, church, and folklore into ostracism, sexuality, and degradation.

My favorite chapter was definitely "Run, Mourner, Run" about a white boy who is bribed by a well-known townsman to sleep with a wealthy, influential black man as blackmail. You know it can't work out well on every level imaginable, but God, the sadness is so quiet in this book, so claustrophobic and soft, it has you knocked out on the floor before you can even realize it. The ways sexuality ripens and blossoms with age are painted so honestly in these stories, and topics of perversion and deviant sexualities are not shied away from.

I now have Kenan's other fiction on my to-read list...the cover of my books claims he's the "black Marquez" of our generation, a spot-on title for an amazing storyteller.

Jacob Hale says

All of the short stories in this book are very carefully crafted, and all center the experiences of people, usually black people, in or from the fictional small town of Tims Creek, North Carolina. Different narrative forms are used in different stories, some extremely interesting, but some distract from the narrativity of the stories. For example, one that didn't work for me in this way is "Ragnarok! The Day the Gods Die," in which a preacher's recollections of his illicit affair with Louise Tate are juxtaposed with his sermon at her funeral. I was fascinated, however, by how Kenan intertwined narrativity and form in the title story, "Let the Dead Bury Their Dead": it is written as an oral history interview, complete with extensive footnotes, some of which reference actual historical literature. "This Far" is a tremendously scathing fictional portrayal of Booker T. Washington. In "Clarence and the Dead" and "Things of This World" the characterizations are tremendously compelling. This book is definitely worth reading -- even the stories that didn't completely win me over contain little gems.

Todd Hoke says

The book (a collection of short stories) centers on the residents of Tims Creek, NC, and has me looking at people in the grocery store differently. I mean, EVERYONE has some freakishly interesting story in their life--yes?--and that's the rock Kenan flips & roots around beneath. A minister eulogizes at his mistresses' funeral, a kid interprets the "speech" of a pig, a 51 year old woman has an affair with a 19 year old, a boy spends time with his old Aunt Essie, and a woman of property is haunted by a youth from her past. There's more, and it's all good stuff.

Rod-Kelly Hines says

Time for a re-read of this, one of the best collections ever

Anderson says

This book digs. It digs into North Carolina. It digs into the characters. It digs into you.

Kenan digs. These stories feel unearthed, raw. Straight from the swampy black soil of North Carolina. They are emotional histories of the rural South standing in front of you, dark as day, with all absurdity, and violence, and yearning, and lord knows what else.

"At length the old man begins to chuckle—a wry, dark mirthful, mocking sound, full of shadows..."

Favorites:

What Are Days?

Run, Mourner, Run

Clarence and the Dead

The Foundations of the Earth

Gabrielle says

One of my favorite short-story collections ever. "Cornsilk" is a classic. Kenan possesses extraordinary skill. I heard him read back when Limbo existed on Avenue A, and the *Paris Review* did a reading series there. Oh, what happened to those fun literary days! I was hypnotized by Kenan's rich, velvety voice, transported by his words, could feel a hot breeze floating through them. The next day, I went out and bought the book, read it, and have returned to it many times over the ensuing years. I need to read more of this author's work!

Alix says

One of my favorite short story collections. Funny, sexy, twisted, sad, or completely free from the bounds of classification. Loved it.

Nihal Vrana says

This book emanates a wild energy; even though some stories are weaker than others all has an excellent flow and a personality. The way Kenan uses Tims Creek, detached in a way in time and space and has its own existence, is beautiful. The best story in the collection is the namesake Let the dead Bury Their Dead; its inventiveness and endless quiriness was a joy to read. The story with Mabel left the biggest visual imprint on me and all stories talked to me in some way or another. It is an exemplary short story collection.

Moira Crone says

A marvelously ambitious and various collection of stories that traces many characters who reside in a small North Carolina Town---Tims Creek. Kenan is an ambitious and versatile artist willing to say anything, and go anywhere---into lust, into the minds of historical figures, into what others might call magic or fantasy, into small town cruelty and nastiness---and out again, into sheer flamboyance. Loved this book. Couldn't put it down.

J says

(FROM JACKET)Folk in the eastern North Carolina town of Tims Creek are pretty much like folk anywhere else, only more interesting-at least when Randall Kenan tells their stories. For one, there's little Clarence Pickett, who at age three began receiving messages from beyond the grave and whose gift seems tied to a hog's ability to talk. Then there's young Dean Williams, hired to seduce the richest black man in Tims Creek, yearning after innocence while he betrays love; and matronly Ida Perry, haunted by a boy her judge husband may have drowned years before. There's Booker T. Washington, on a visit just before his death in 1915, and an Asian seemingly fallen from the sky-an angel?-and the Right Reverend Barden, preaching the eulogy over a body he's enjoyed in the throes of passion....

Donna says

I loved this book.. I read it a long time ago but recall enjoying the richness of the stories, places and characters and how all the stories were connected by the characters and the place.. It flowed and painted a vivid picture of life at this place and time... Perhaps it is time to read it again..

June says

A favorite quote:

Fictional Judge Theodore Sturgis Perry to the Reverend Howard Clemmons on the occasion of Thanksgiving dinner, 1979:

"Now I don't claim to have dotted every i and crossed every t--any man who does is a damned liar, and Howard, you know it to be true. In the end a man must look back on what he's accomplished and ask himself: Did I rise to 50% of the challenge? Did I make life easier for myself and others? Did I do right by my family and my God? And when all is said and done it is only between you and your Lord with whom you must reckon. And I tell you right now, Howard, I have no fear."

Michael says

Randall Kenan's story-telling is off-the-chain! Is it fantasy? Is it reality? Are the characters crazy? It keeps you guessing, and I like it! Dude is fearless, which can be a pro or con, depending on your perspective. I want to write like him when I grow up!
