



The Tide King

Jen Michalski

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Stanley Polensky and Calvin Johnson serve in Germany during World War II. Calvin, near death after being shelled, is given a bewitched herb by Stanley but then left for dead. Each soldier returns from the war and years pass. Calvin, discovering that he cannot age and cannot die, searches for Stanley to get answers. Michalski's *The Tide King* is the story of burnette saxifrage, an herb rumored in Polish folklore to provide those who eat it with immortality, and its effects on three generations of a Polish family over two continents beginning in 19th-century Poland and ending in 1976 America. But it is also the story of young men's sacrifice during great wars, of a young child's experiences during the holocaust and being a war orphan, of the curiosities of the American century, such as 1950s country music and smoke jumpers in the Montana mountains and 1970s New York. Just as Viking king Cnut, who was rumored to be so powerful that he controlled the tides at his feet, discovered "how empty and worthless is the power of kings," Calvin Johnson and others cursed by the herb find in *The Tide King* that the power of youth and immortality is an empty gift, for they will continually witness the death of their families, lovers, dreams, and ideals.

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