



PRESS RELEASE FOR INAUGURAL KALAHARI SHORT STORY COMPETITION

ANGLOPHONE SUBMISSIONS

The inaugural Kalahari short story competition solicited works from all across the globe hoping to attract a broad range of writers and their beautiful stories. Sifting through hundreds of entries from multiple countries, the judges, May-Lan Tan, Caoilinn Hughes and Elnathan John brought the richness and variety of their experience to this important process. We are thankful for their time and effort and for all of the writers who trusted us with their stories. In total, we received 286 stories from 49 countries. We are also pleased to see so much vibrancy in this important genre. While we celebrate all the entries, the judges had the arduous task of selecting three stories for this prize and we are thrilled to present them below along with praise by the judges.

THIRD PLACE: *The Machine* by Muhumuza Charles (Kampala, Uganda).

This affecting and memorable story about a village being slowly consumed by modernization is narrated from the collective perspective of the boys in the community. The first-person plural voice gives the piece a haunting, choral resonance, and it helps us to understand how connected these boys are to each other and to the communal well and stream that interlace every aspect of their lives and facilitate their friendships and relationships. Their bodies and the bodies of water are locked together like parts of a machine that is gradually disassembled and usurped by the monstrous presence of the water pipeline. **-May-Lan Tan**

A beautifully controlled with wonderfully placed detail, 'The Machine' is an allegorical story that plays into and adapts the archetypal story about technology forcefully introduced to rural communities and gravely interfering with the balance and rhythms of those communities. The voice has a certain mechanistic, historiographical quality that is an unexpected and effective choice. **-Caoilinn Hughes**

Through this well paced narrative, the apt metaphor of the machine — the slow insidious incursion of technology and development touted as advancement into the lives of people with often disastrous effects — skillfully makes us question the legacy of modern inventions. Through its poignant and poetic language, *The Machine* lays bare the challenges facing those who seek to dismantle the monsters of modernity. **-Elnathan John**

SECOND PLACE: *A Mother's Face Is An Atlas That Leads You Home* by Howard M-B Maximus (Buea, Cameroon)

In this story about two teenagers secretly plotting to move to the United States, the immigrant dream is superimposed onto the transition into adulthood. As they prepare to leave their homeland, the boys are forced to choose between the need to individuate and the desire to maintain fealty to their loved ones. As they cross boundaries and chart new territory, customary rites of passage become indistinguishable from scorched earth transgressions. This story is funny and heartbreaking, and its confident, kinetic voice had me gripped from the start. **-May-Lan Tan**

This story's voice is pitch-perfect: propulsive, authentic, energetic and aspirational. The story's scope is bravado as its narrator; compressing what could well be a picaresque novella into just 3,300 words. The characterization is very compelling, suggesting a creative energy that promises fine work. -**Caoilinn Hughes**

Confident and unruly, this short story swashbuckles its way through this often humorous narrative with sprightly language. Through its rich characterization, the protagonist plotting to leave his home country, comes alive, and with him his angst, his desires and his dreams. -**Elnathan John**

WINNER

My Husband's Wife by **Ogamba Frances** (Port Harcourt, Nigeria)

A quietly devastating work that realizes its ambitions with impeccable grace while feeling completely organic. Seemingly without exposition, the writer establishes the characters, setting and cultural mores, and, through the cadence of the language, subtly evokes the story's emotional climate and constellation. I was captivated by the serene precision of the writing, its strong, steady pulse, and the many layers moving beneath its surface. -**May-Lan Tan**

"My Husband's Wife" introduces an arresting, humorous and incisive voice from the first sentence and maintains it to the last. A timeless, deeply compelling story, teeming with perfectly observed details. The narrative carries the reader confidentially along as though we were strapped to the speaker's chest. -**Caoilinn Hughes**

From the first fertile paragraph, My Husband's Wife skillfully situates us in the lush and fecund world which is the protagonist's percipient mind. The story, simple but by no means simplistic, takes us on an intimate journey of loss and love and the heaviness of betrayal. -**Elnathan John**

Interestingly, the judges decided to single out a story that could not make it to the shortlist for an honorable mention. This is a welcome development as it takes into account the nature of competitions and the difficulty of choosing a finite amount of winners when there are many more interesting or worthy stories. It is our pleasure to present the judges' honorable mention:

Body Parts by **Coastes Christine** (Cape Town, South Africa)

Through its thoughtful execution, this story transcends the constraints of its subject matter to explore themes of melancholy and loss without becoming static or insular or feeling hollow itself. Instead of trapping the protagonist within her interiority, the writer deploys the character's obsessiveness and disquiet to transform this absence into a living thing that propels her through a sequence of cityscapes suffused with tension and menace. The ocean motif interleaves the story with glimpses of the natural world, intensifying its wild, hallucinatory atmosphere. —**May-Lan Tan**

This story covers an awesome amount of ground--details, landscapes, contextual information--in 3,500 words. This stuffing could easily hinder another story, but it lends "Body Parts" a suitably fractured, frenetic, propulsive quality; and it plays well into the central pressure of the story: a pressure that comes from absence. - **Caoilinn Hughes**

Painful as it was to not include this brilliant story in the shortlist, it would be remiss of the judges not to mention this brilliant story, remarkable in its richness and fluidity. Painstakingly executed, Body Parts paints a clear image of loss and emptiness, of absence and being. I was captivated by the minutiae of the narrative as well as its expansiveness, and like swimming through an ocean, we observe not just the surreal details but the breath of feeling and thought. -**Elnathan John**

The prize will be awarded on December 5, 2020.