

Acknowledgments

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Love, respect, blessings to my mother, Freda, and brother Keïta for their boundless support and enthusiasm.

UNIVERSAL ACCLAIM FOR AN AMAZING NEW TALENT

NALO HOPKINSON

Winner of the Aspect First Novel Contest

Finalist for the Philip K. Dick Award

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"It's been many a day since I've read anything so bursting with robust, inventive energy and singing language . . . a wonderful job."

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"Transports you not only to a different world, but to a different way of looking at the world. This is what SF is supposed to be and so often isn't: provocative, intelligent, original."

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"An impressive debut precisely because of Hopkinson's fresh viewpoint."

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"Simply triumphant."

—**Dorothy Allison, author of *Bastard Out of Carolina***

"Fusing Afro-Caribbean soul and speech in an intriguing landscape of spirits . . . a terrifying battle between good and evil."

—***Black Issues Book Review***

"A wonderful sense of narrative and a finely tuned ear for dialogue . . . balances a well-crafted and imaginative story with incisive social critique and a vivid sense of place."

—***Emerge***

"A parable of black feminist self-reliance, couched in poetic language and the structural conventions of classic SF."

—***Village Voice***

"Splendid. . . Superbly plotted and redolent of the rhythms of Afro-Caribbean speech."

—***Kirkus Reviews***

"A book to remember."

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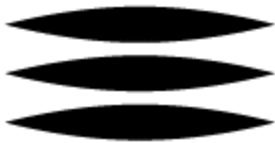
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NALO
HOPKINSON

ASPECT



“Unique . . . elements of SF, fantasy, and horror blended into a story as hot as a pot of Pickapeppa sauce.”

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“Stunning novel . . . gets into the nitty-gritty of some tough urban issues.”

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ISBN 0-7595-8202-5

A trade paperback edition of this book was published in 2000 by Warner Books.

First eBook edition: March 2001

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Stolen

I stole the torturer's tongue

it's the first side of me some see

the first line you hear

first line of defense when I say

“See this long tongue illicitly acquired—doesn't it suit me well?

hear these long words assiduously applied—

don't I wield them well?

wouldn't you be foolish if you tried to tackle me in anything so complex as a kiss or a conversation?”

I stole the torturer's tongue!

hear this long tongue!

feel this long tongue!

this tongue sometimes my only tool not mine entirely but what is?

I was raised protectively of/as/by other peoples' property—I got over that
this tongue is yours too if you can take it

I stole the torturer's tongue!

man wouldn't recognize this dancing, twining, retrained flesh if it slapped
upside the empty space in him head—

it will, it has; he'll pay for the pleasure;

watch him try an' claim as his own this long, strong old tongue's

new-remembered rhythms. . . .

hear this long tongue!

fear this long tongue!

know this tall tale to be mine too, and I'll live or die by it.

I stole the torturer's tongue!

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Tan-Tan and the Rolling Calf

One time, Tan-Tan was on the run again, oui, barely ahead of the bounty hunters. She did just done kill a man; a pimp who used to specialize in young young girls, and a pusher too besides.

Truth to tell, nobody on New Half-Way Tree was sorry he dead, but murder was murder, and Tan-Tan had to pay. So she run. She bind up she locks so nobody could recognise she, and she head for the bush, like always when she in trouble. She hike for hours, until she was far, far from home, and tired. Night was coming on, but Resurrection Town

was just over the next mountain. It had a woman there named Pearl who would feed she and hide she for the night. So Tan-Tan head up the mountain path, dragging she feet with tiredness, but keeping she eyes open for trouble.

It had a nice evening breeze blowing soft through the trees beside the path. Is the same song the breeze used to sing in the trees on Toussaint planet, when Tan-Tan was a little gal pickney.

Walking along, she almost forget she was a exile on New Half-Way Tree with a curse on she head from the douens-them: every time she take from somebody, she had was to give back twice as much to a next somebody. But she couldn't really forget the curse, nuh? All like how she just take a life, she was going to have to save two more, just to even up. Tan-Tan could hear the whispering of the douens starting up in she head again:

It ain't have no magic in do-for-do,

If you take one, you must give back two.

Tan-Tan sigh and keep walking. Up ahead, she spy a form in the dark, someone hurrying to get home; a woman in long skirts. The woman was walking fast-fast, she shoulders all scrunch up together. She looking from side to side into the bush every minute, as though she could see trouble before it reach, oui? A tree frog shout "Breck-eck!" into the night, and the woman jump like jumbie on she tail, and start to make haste even faster. Tan-Tan see a chance to do somebody good, and quiet down some of the whispering in she head. She shout:

"Evening, sister: is home you going?" The woman cry out, "Lawd ha' mercy!" and whip round to see who coming up behind she.

Tan-Tan say, "Don't frighten, lady, don't frighten. I just going over the mountain, past Resurrection Town to Juncanoo. I going to spend some time with my old grannie; she ain't too strong any more, oui."

As Tan-Tan get closer, she could see the woman shoulders relax, but she voice still tremble when she reply, “Thanks God, you is a honest woman. Bounty hunters tell we Tan-Tan round the place, and I frighten to walk this lonely road by myself so late at night. I stay too late in the market. I ’fraid Tan-Tan hold me and cut me throat like hog!”

Tan-Tan smile to hear somebody call she a honest woman. “Is alright, lady, I could walk a little way with you to keep you company. Is where you going?”

Sadie was going to Basse-Terre, a village beside Resurrection Town. Tan-Tan agree to walk with she until the path fork at the bottom of the hill. As they walk, they talk about things: how ackee dear in the market now with the drought; and what a sad thing it was for a woman to turn outlaw and have she heart so hard like the Robber Queen Tan-Tan; and what a way pickney-child wouldn’t mind their elders nowadays. Little-little, Sadie start to laugh and joke with she like them was old friend. It was hard work for Tan-Tan; long time since she just make

old-talk. Sadie almost catch she out when she ask, “And what about you, my dear? You think your nen-nen going to get well again?”

Which nen-nen? Tan-Tan almost answer, but she remember she story in time: “I ain’t know.

She old now, you see. Every time she get sick like this, she never come back as strong as before.” Tan-Tan bow she head to shake it in pretend sadness over she pretend nen-nen. That is when she see a shadow shifting right where Sadie was about to step. Tan-Tan yell out, “Mind you foot!” but too late: Sadie step down hard; the shadow yelp; Sadie scream “Oh God oh God!” and jump back behind Tan-Tan. Tan-Tan make haste and pull out she machète, but when she look good at the shadow, she only start one set of laughing. It ain’t nothing but a small beast, cringing on the ground in front of the two women, growling a baby growl and waving a tiny tail back and forth in the dust on the path. Tan-Tan re-sheathe she machète and bend down to pick up the beast. She show it to Sadie: