



## Falling in Love with Hominids

**Nalo Hopkinson**

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*Hopkinson gives her characters various levels of reliability, rooting magical realism in reality to create a surreal collection of stories.*

*Falling in Love with Hominids* collects eighteen short stories by Nalo Hopkinson and demonstrates that she is a writer with a vivid imagination and a knack for storytelling. Most of Hopkinson's stories would qualify as magic realism, with fantastical elements sharing the page with real-world characters and environments, but the variety of her stories helps them stand on their own outside of a genre context. These are just good stories by any definition.

One of the best shorts in the collection is "Message in a Bottle," in which the first-person narrator learns about his friends' child, who is presumed to have a rare disease that stunts her aging. While the story's plot relies on significant twists, it is the writing that stands out most, from how Hopkinson sets up the narrator's mixed feelings about children to the way she expertly uses time jumps to keep the pace compelling.

Another highlight is "Old Habits," set in a mall populated by the ghosts of the people who died there, all of whom have to reexperience their deaths every day. The characters reminisce about the simple pleasures they can no longer experience and form a unit held together by the one thing they have in common—the location of their death.

Other strong stories in the book include "The Smile on the Face," in which the story of Margaret of Antioch takes on new meaning for a teen girl at a friend's party; "Delicious Monster," which features generations of a family tradition; and "Emily Breakfast," in which a couple and their cat search for an unusual missing chicken. These stories all have fantasy elements that work well because the characters are so believable and grounded.

Throughout *Falling in Love with Hominids*, Hopkinson shows her versatility. She works equally well using first- and third-person narration, narrators with various levels of reliability, and a number of dialects. Most importantly, she has a rare skill for quickly establishing the rules of her fantastical elements and keeping to them, without the stories ever feeling heavy on exposition.

JEFF FLEISCHER (Fall 2015)

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