



## ★ Jamaica Ginger and Other Concoctions

**Nalo Hopkinson**

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A commanding short story collection, Caribbean Canadian Nalo Hopkinson's *Jamaica Ginger and Other Concoctions* blends ecological awareness, cultural heritage, and fantastical happenings.

In the mordant story "Clap Back," Wenda, an art student, collects racist Black American objects for an exhibit. She brushes each with a mixture of lethal bacteria, "plasticizers, amino acids, and dissolved glucose." The items come to life with liberated vengeance: "cooning rictus" grins relax into natural smiles, while stereotypical watermelon slices are "drop-kicked into the air."

In "Pocket Universe," elderly Sadika works with an "artist caseworker" to design her final resting place. As her brain is scanned for sensations to create a relevant "burial house," Sadika remembers the salty delight of her grandmother's red peas soup. She also recalls her time as a sex worker with pride; while on "the stroll," she supported herself and her children with her skills and the pleasure she offered. And "Jamaica Ginger" (coauthored by Nisi Shawl) is set in quasi-historical New Orleans, where Nikola Tesla–inspired receivers, wireless transmitters, and automatons challenge the antiquity of kerosene lamps and train porters. Here, a woman uses her fascination with machinery to push past the limitations that society places on her gender.

Climate change is a recurring theme: there are diseased, parched landscapes and ravaging floods. Many of the characters are resourceful women of color who are determined to improve their troubled environments; they summon remarkable scientific, technological, and mechanical abilities to heal others and solve problems.

Enriched with a marrow of emotion, the short stories of *Jamaica Ginger and Other Concoctions* move beyond bleak dystopian landscapes into a curious universe marked by damage and possibility.

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