

Tropical Writers Short Story Competition: March 2024. Prompt – ‘SPLIT’

Manuscript Notes/Feedback

GENERAL:

Thanks for opportunity to provide the prompt and to judge this month's competition. There were 6 entries, with each writer taking an interesting - and quite different - approach to the single word prompt 'SPLIT'.

I enjoyed reading every story, with their thematic range from the gently humorous, reflective, and traumatic to sharply witty, slightly creepy and dramatically filmic.

There was good use of expressive language and imagery by all the writers, and interesting, creatively diverse story lines.

I have some general comments and suggestions that are hopefully relevant to everyone here who writes short stories. You have probably all heard them before, but I think they are important to carry with us as we write and read across a range of fiction, non-fiction and different styles of writing and genres.

Of course, the most important I believe is to read as much as possible of the kind of writing you want to practise. So: if you are writing short stories, read a lot of short stories, find the genres and writing styles that resonate with you as a writer, and look at them closely – as a reader. It is equally important to read and examine closely stories whose style, content and genre appeal to you but then fail to fully engage or satisfy you as a reader, as those that thrill and spur you on as a writer. Consider why and how some stories 'work' and others do not. Structure, language, dialogue, setting, characterisation – even simplicity and complexity are just some of the factors to consider and evaluate in the short stories you read so you can hone your analytic skills and use them to self-evaluate as you write.

Apply the questions – and answers – your reading experiences raise to your own storytelling process, including:

- Is there a clear story arc?
- Does your ending work effectively?
- Will your reader care about your characters?
- Does your story have internal logic, no matter the genre?
- Have you created sufficient tension in the story to engage readers? For example: a conflict, a mystery, a thrill, a drama, a complication?

Additionally – Edit, edit, edit. Reading a short story or a poem aloud is a great way to self-edit and pick up problems with tense, dialogue and flow of language. Also beware of using stereotypical characters, cliched dialogue and descriptive language. This is very easy to do particularly with crime writing.

Ocean Predators

Exciting story that felt like an action film as I was reading it!

Structure worked well with a clear story arc however I felt the word count could not do justice to such a complex narrative, with insufficient space to give characters depth, and create a logical time frame for the action.

Double Take

Witty detective-style story with a creepy protagonist and feel to the relationship aspect.

Well-structured with an unexpected ending.

Take care with internal logic of the narrative and characterisations, particularly if the story is set in a 'real' place.

Indo-China Gothic

Interesting and emotional story about how trauma can be triggered by seemingly benign situations.

Effective structure with present triggering both memory of past and reflection in the present.

Traumatic memory could impact reader more profoundly if the narrator's emotions are at the centre of the memory, more than the details of what happened.

Rocky Road

Nicely written humorous tale of a family incident that becomes a family legend.

Good structure and an engaging tale with well-developed characters who we care about.

Suggest reading aloud to adjust dialogue and check use of punctuation.

The Gift of Giving

Witty and cynical tale of why someone would choose to 'Split'.

Take care with internal logic and clarity of narrative arc.

Well-structured with an engaging conclusion.

Dim Sim Dispersion

Nicely drawn story with great descriptive language and an interesting main character.

Conclusion worked, but I think could be made more dramatic, which would be more satisfying to the reader as the scenario is quite comic.

Take care with using tense consistently. First person present tense will bring the reader right into the restaurant with the protagonist.

The story I selected as the winner is ***The Gift of Giving***.

The prompt was used really effectively – no need to add the word to the text or title, it was clear that this story described splitting. I really enjoyed the dry humour, the pace, the voice of the narrator and the quirky, cynical tone of the story!