

Graywolf Press announces



WALKING ON COWRIE SHELLS
STORIES
By **Nana Nkweti**

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A virtuosic debut collection that roves across genres and styles, by a finalist for the AKO Caine Prize

Praise for *Walking on Cowrie Shells*

A Most Anticipated Book for 2021 by **The Millions** and **The Rumpus**

“Raucous and thoroughly impressive. . . . Nkweti’s utterly original stories range from laugh-out-loud funny to heartbreaking, and are often both. . . . Sensitivity, nuance and keen attention to history shine through on every page of the collection. . . . These are stories to get lost in again and again.”

—***The New York Times Book Review***

“[*Walking on Cowrie Shells*] revels in variety—of character, style, and even genre. . . . Lively and fast-paced, funny and tragic, these stories refuse a singular African experience in favor of a vivid plurality.”

—***The New Yorker, Briefly Noted***

“A linguistic pole vaulter, [Nana] Nkweti bends language like a master. . . . *Walking On Cowrie Shells* is a terrific read, each story different and varied from the one before. Nkweti has proven herself a bright new star.”

—**NPR.org**

“Dazzling. . . . With the ease of a master, [Nkweti] shifts between points of view, between American and African slang, and between the straightforward and the avant-garde. . . . The result is an intense, sweeping and altogether stunning reading experience.”—***BookPage, starred review***

Drawing from mystery, horror, myth, and graphic novels, Nana Nkweti showcases the complexity and vibrance of Cameroonian and American cultures in her debut story collection, *Walking on Cowrie Shells*. In the AKO Caine Prize finalist story “It Takes a Village, Some Say,” she skewers racial prejudice and the practice of international adoption, delivering a sly tale about a teenage girl who leverages her adoptive parents to fast-track her fortunes. In “The Devil Is a Liar,” a pastor’s wife struggles with the collision of Western Christianity and her mother’s traditional Cameroonian belief system as she worries about her unborn child. In other stories, Nkweti vaults past realism, upending genre expectations in a satirical romp about a jaded PR professional trying to spin a zombie outbreak in West Africa, and in a mermaid tale about a Mami Wata who forgoes her power by remaining faithful to a fisherman she loves. A dazzling, inventive debut, *Walking on Cowrie Shells* announces the arrival of a superlative new voice.

Nana Nkweti is an AKO Caine Prize finalist and alumna of the Iowa Writers’ Workshop. Her work has garnered fellowships from MacDowell, Kimbilio, Ucross, and the Wurlitzer Foundation, among others. She is a professor of English at the University of Alabama.

June 1, 2021, Fiction, 176 pages, 5.5 x 8.25, \$16.00, Trade Paperback (978-1-64445-054-3)

More Praise for *Walking on Cowrie Shells*

“What unites all these stories is the strength of Nkweti’s writing; it crackles with energy and verve.”—**BuzzFeed**

“Audacious and masterful. . . . Anyone who appreciates authentic and original fiction will find something to love here. And that's a promise.”—**Star Tribune** (Minneapolis)

“A vivacious collection with sentences that sizzle on the page. . . . Nkweti’s book is sharp and gorgeous.”

—**Women’s Review of Books**

“It takes some verve to go from zombies and mermaids to Comic-Con to the suburbs of New Jersey and Cameroon and back again in a single collection, and Nkweti does it in her very first, which is vibrant and polyphonic. . . . [Her prose is] acrobatic and delightful.”—**Lit Hub**

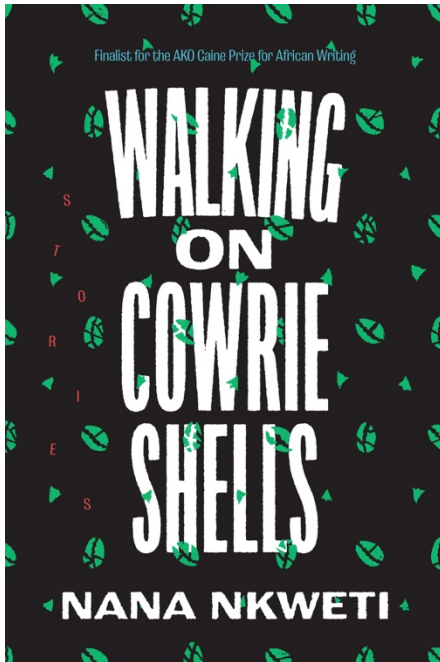
“With [Nkweti’s] dazzling, sonically-driven prose and beautiful structural moves, this collection stands out as both a celebration of the African-American experience and a masterclass in storytelling.”—**Heavy Feather Review**

“Explosive prose and imaginative plots characterize this debut collection. . . . Nkweti’s stories offer a wonderfully immersive experience. . . . Deliciously disorienting at times and always energizing, [Nkweti’s] style calls to mind code-switching as well as the rich polyvocality of America. . . . Boisterous and high-spirited debut stories by a talented new writer.”—**Kirkus Reviews, starred review**

“Beautiful and immersive. . . . Whether Nkweti is writing about water goddesses, zombies, or aspiring graphic novelists, she reveals and celebrates the rich inner lives of those who do not fit neatly into social and cultural categories. But the author’s prose shines the brightest; Nkweti’s sentences soar, enthralling the reader through their every twist and turn, and often ending with a wry punch. . . . This is a groundbreaking and vital work.”

—**Publishers Weekly, starred review**

Advance Praise for *Walking on Cowrie Shells*



“Nana Nkweti’s **exuberant** collection is full of stories that weave together love and friendship, horror and comedy, all with great **deftness**. The characters, straddling continents and cultures, carving out a place for themselves, remind me of home. A **wonderful** debut.”—Yaa Gyasi, author of *Transcendent Kingdom* and *Homegoing*

“These genre-leaping stories are **funny** and **heartbreaking** and **wonderfully ferocious**; it’s been ages since I’ve read sentences with this much verve and snap. *Walking on Cowrie Shells* is a delightful, rollicking debut.”—Carmen Maria Machado, author of *Her Body and Other Parties* and *In the Dream House*

“*Walking on Cowrie Shells* is a **virtuosic, kaleidoscopic** debut, one that rejects the paint-by-number templates of storytelling to refresh our sense of what fiction can be and do. Nana Nkweti’s **supersonic prose** breaks the sound barrier as she crisscrosses genres and cultures and continents, from a zombie outbreak in Cameroon to a *kunstlerroman* set at Comic Con. Satirical, playful, keenly critical of the racist stereotypes and received narratives that limit women’s lives, these polyphonic tales are a joy to read. Nkweti’s **ambitious, amphibious** tales capture the diverse and complex experience of “hyphenated-Americans” who, like Nkweti, have deep roots in Africa and America. It would be impossible to overstate how much I love this book, and its author.”—Karen Russell, author of *Orange World*

“Let us thank whoever granted Nana Nkweti her all-access-pass to the human soul, for with it she is able to gain entry into the lives of women and men, children and adults, the damaged and the damaging, the human and the not-quite, all with equal clarity and conviction. *Walking on Cowrie Shells* is a collection of **verve, audacity, and consummate control**. That it is her first book makes it all the more astonishing.”—Kevin Brockmeier, author of *The Ghost Variations*

“Nana Nkweti **trills** and **enchants**. This totally vibrant collection spins a wonder of love and horror. Each fresh universe is more captivating than the next. Always human, *Walking on Cowrie Shells* searches through the real and into the hyperreal. Nkweti’s words are **dazzlingly energetic, world-ranging** and **straight-up brilliant**.”
—Samantha Hunt, author of *The Dark Dark*

“What an **intoxicating** book! **Magical, funny, inventive** and **joyous**, Nkweti’s tales remind us what storytelling can be.”—Andrew Sean Greer, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Less*



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To request a review copy or to arrange an interview with the author, please contact:
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