

nd  
f to  
ne  
ed  
an  
r  
ed  
air  
An  
of  
t.

## THE JUDGES

Your entries for this year's competition were read, reread and hotly debated by our expert judging panel. The w&h panel, Editorial Director Frith Thomas, Managing Editor Kate Macfarlane and Chief Sub-Editor Ruth Taylor were joined by external judges, MD of Pan Macmillan SA Terry Morris, Marketing and Publicity Manager of Exclusive Books Rene Brophy, and literary agent Ronald Irwin. The theme 'The Photograph', attracted a huge entry, but after much discussion, our expert panel chose seven finalists, two runners-up and our winner, Jacqui Wiles. Frith Thomas said: "It's the perfect w&h fit, I loved it!"

## WHAT THEY WON

### FIRST PRIZE

A Hedgren hamper valued at R12 000, 1 x HP Mini 210 Vivienne Tam (VT) valued at R4 999, Waterman Carene Pink Gold ST Ball Pen valued at R4 000, Twinings Tea Chest and a variety of Twinings products valued at R4 000.

### SECOND PRIZE

A R6 000 Hedgren hamper, 1 x HP Photosmart A526 with 5 x HP 110 cartridges (printer worth R1 049, cartridges valued at R1 045), Waterman Carene Silver Meridian Ball Pen, worth R3 000, Twinings Tea Chest and a variety of Twinings products valued at R3 000.

### THIRD PRIZE

A Hedgren hamper valued at R4 000, 1 x HP Photosmart A526 with 5 x HP 110 cartridges, Waterman Carene Black Sea ST Ball Pen, valued at R2 000, Twinings Tea Chest and a variety of Twinings products valued at R2 000.

### RUNNERS-UP

7 x Waterman Hemisphere Shimmery Pink Ball Pens, valued at R1 000 each, and 7 x Twinings Tea Chests and a variety of Twinings products valued at R1 000 each. w&h

Hedgren



TWININGS  
OF LONDON

WATERMAN

## W&H SHORT STORY COMPETITION

# Meet the winners!

Great entries made this year's competition tough to call – we congratulate the winner and runners-up

## THE WINNER

### Heaven-Sent by Jacqui Wiles

Jacqui is a part-time teacher of English as a foreign language and lives in Dunkeld, Johannesburg with her husband. They have a grown-up son and daughter who live in London. She's an avid reader and loves writing.



## THE STORY

Cassie's journey to scatter her great-aunt's ashes brings back old memories and leads her to new love.

## JUDGES SAY

A well thought-out plot written in a believable and sensitive way.

Both heart-warming and beautifully narrated, it has pace, humour, intrigue and romance all in one.

## THE RUNNERS-UP

### 2ND PRIZE

#### THE PHOTOGRAPH by JP Du Toit

JP is a writer and actor from Centurion. He's father to a four-year-old boy. This is his first short story.

**Story** A breast cancer survivor's nostalgic moment.

**Judges say** A thought-provoking story with an excellent ending.

### 3RD PRIZE VENUS IN THE BEDROOM

by Maya Fowler  
Maya is a copy-editor and translator and lives in Claremont. Her interests include literature and travel.

**Story** A husband's affair leads his wife to take drastic measures.

**Judges say** Slightly dark and engaging with a fabulous twist.

**RETURN TO SENDER**  
by Lydia Gittens, a nursing sister from Hermanstad.

**Story** An intriguing story

of lost love revisited.

**Judges say** Good use of topic with a touching conclusion.  
**SANCTUM** by Sohini Gowan, a freelance medical writer from Mulbarton.

**Story** A pregnant woman searching for a home encounters an eccentric landlady.

**Judges say** Wonderful idea and writing style.

**THE SOUVENIR** by Lynley Main, from Roodepoort, loves books and writing.

**Story** A young woman is imprisoned for a string of sexual crimes.

**Judges say** Sets up the tension well; hooks the reader from the start.

**A FLICKER OF LIGHT** by Bevan Frank, who is a legal consultant and freelance journalist from Royal Ascot.

**Story** A young boy has a vision of his dead father advising him how to save a life.

**Judges say** An

unpredictable twist.  
**THE PHOTOGRAPH** by Sandra Falkenstein, who loves gardening, reading and writing. She lives in Constantia.

**Story** A family comes together under difficult circumstances.

**Judges say** Good use of strong imagery.

**THE PHOTOGRAPH** by Joy Watson, who is a senior researcher from Kenilworth.

**Story** Suspecting her husband is cheating, a woman visits a traditional healer.

**Judges say** Touching, with a great local flavour.

**SLIPPER LOVE** by Kirsti Bauer, who studies English literature and psychology at UCT.

**Story** A woman tries to make her husband fall in love with her again after 30 years of marriage.

**Judges say** A fresh approach to age-old subject matter.



**E**very girl should have an eccentric aunt," Cassie thought, glancing down at the black, velvet purse on the seat beside her, before driving down the hill towards the village settling into the dusk below.

Some of her friends had been horrified at the thought of her driving down to the coast with Great Aunt Louisa zipped into her favourite sequined jewellery pouch on the passenger seat.

"That's so creepy!" Julia had squealed. Cassie had not worried at all. Louisa had always been utterly matter-of-fact about such things and Cassie had rather enjoyed the journey and the uninterrupted time it had given her to relive happy memories she had of 'Loopy Louisa', as her father had insisted on calling her.

And finally, here she was, ready to fulfil the last of Aunt Louisa's rather unorthodox wishes. "A private cremation, please," her will had stated, "my friends and most of my family have long gone and before any inheritance happens, I wish to be scattered into the sea from the cliff tops at Double

Bay. No histrionics; just Champagne, a picnic, and a calm evening, so I don't blow back again. I wouldn't want to haunt the old house."

While Mr Simpson had managed to look as though such requests were a regular part of his estate work, Cassie's brothers had been appalled and had offered instant and simultaneous reasons why there was no possible way either of them could find the time to get down to such a remote part of the country to fulfil so peculiar a wish. It was years since they had been so far east and Cassie's suggestion that the experience might be good for the serious off-road vehicles they drove, was not well received. She was, Bruce told her, "rather in danger of becoming an eccentric aunt herself".

There were worse things to be than an eccentric aunt, Cassie decided. And if it hadn't been for Louisa, where would she be now, she wondered? Buttoned up in a townhouse in spread-eagled suburbia, desperately juggling a job, social life and maybe a marriage she was already

regretting? Instead she was in this old hotel room, listening to the surf crash on the rocks and about to embark on a dream photographic assignment in the morning. Combining a creative exercise with her aunt's unusual request had made it easier for Cassie to cope with the potentially sad farewell and she knew that Louisa, pragmatic to the end, would approve.

She knew, too, that Louisa would have applauded her adored great niece's change in direction to become a freelance photographer. "Don't compromise on your dreams, Cassie," she could almost hear her aunt's voice in the room. "There's far too much world out there; you'll find them somewhere, maybe when you least expect to."

Well, she'd started her journey right here, in this tiny off-the-map village and it seemed singularly appropriate that Louisa should be here with her, even if only to say her final goodbye. Her bags unpacked, Cassie carefully set Great Aunt Louisa down on the dressing table in her hotel room. There was no safe in the room and

besides, anyone checking for valuables would be disappointed, if not mystified, by its contents.

Unsentimental to the end, Louisa had left very little of herself behind, which made her final request something of a surprise, along with the old Manila envelope Cassie had found wedged in the deepest recesses of her aunt's wardrobe. Having puzzled over its contents again, she carefully rewrapped the pansy shells, delicate as porcelain, in the yellowed tissue paper, along with a blue ribbon, a heart-shaped beach pebble and finally, the delicate pencil sketches and the mysterious photograph, faded and small with a curling, serrated border.

Cassie hesitated, studying the picture for the umpteenth time. Who was he? In uniform, tall and angular, squinting into the sun with the horizon behind him, he was most certainly not her portly Great Uncle George. She couldn't quite resign herself to never knowing his identity and there were fewer and fewer people of Louisa's generation who might be able to enlighten her.

The hotel's dinner gong sounded! That such traditions still existed delighted Cassie and she obediently made her way downstairs to the small dining room. She brought the average age down by several decades and found herself to be the object of friendly curiosity. In no time, Mr Ward, the third-generation hotel owner, had established her connection to Double Bay and part of the reason for her visit. Her family's old beach house had changed hands yet again, she discovered, and was now owned by an architect. "Doing major alterations," Mr Ward enthused. "Spends most weekends down here; sometimes camps on the site."

Morning broke like a blessing, the rising sun throwing shards of gold across a crystalline sea and gilding the fynbos. She had started out early and felt sure she had some close-to-perfect shots. Ready for a late breakfast, she skipped down the dunes, planning the remainder of the day. It was a pity she would be the only person seeing Louisa on her way and now that the task was almost upon her, she found herself feeling faintly daunted by the prospect.

Her brothers, while showing some obligatory fraternal concern about her setting off on a long road trip to parts

unknown, had displayed no qualms about her handling this unusual farewell alone. "You were always her undisputed favourite," said James. "She was never remotely interested in us boys. It makes perfect sense for you to see the crazy old bat on her way." Her sisters-in-law exchanged congratulatory glances; the skeletons were all in cupboards belonging to the other side of the family...

Feeling a little dishevelled after her long walk back, she glanced around the veranda on which breakfast was served. The other hotel guests appeared to be a party of recreational fishermen. Retired businessmen with all the latest gear, they escaped for hours while their wives seemed content to read and knit the time away. Cassie relaxed with her coffee and took out her book. And then her heart stopped... Just like that and without warning it simply missed a beat before seeming to somersault in her chest cavity. For the rest of her life she would wonder about the very physical reaction she experienced at that moment and also, whether in some seminally instinctive way, she'd known immediately that nothing would ever be the same again.

What in the world was someone like that doing in this back-of-beyond place? A roll of building plans tucked casually under one arm, he strolled over to a table on the edge of the veranda and folded his considerable length into a chair. Unruly hair, wearing a crisp white shirt – sleeves rolled up – and faded jeans, he was completely oblivious to her and proceeded to tuck into his English breakfast with enthusiasm, while her appetite disappeared over the horizon and she tried to restore some order to her table. Thank goodness he was oblivious; she'd knocked over her coffee and was suddenly acutely aware of her coastal curbs and wishing she had thought to bring her ghd on this trip...

As soon as she could, she escaped up to her room to compose herself. What was that all about? Not even Matt had elicited a reaction like that and she still clearly remembered thinking how nice he looked the first time she'd seen him across a crowded dance floor. She'd nearly married him, for goodness sake, and recalled with a pang the hurt and confusion they'd both felt when she'd ended the relationship.

She had told Louisa about it. In her nineties and almost confined to her bed, her aunt had listened calmly. She hadn't seemed at all surprised and as Cassie was leaving, she softly said, "Loving someone not quite enough is never fair. All or nothing, Cassandra. Remember that."

This was different. She felt 16 all over again but as awkward as a 12 year old and, most bewildering of all, she had felt in the first instant of seeing him, a deep sense of recognition, so strong it had left her breathless. She twisted up her treacherous hair, gathered her camera equipment and slipped quietly out onto the dirt road. If he was the 'camping architect', maybe she'd have a chance to see the house while he had breakfast at the hotel.

Ridiculous, she told herself, to react like that to a total stranger. He was at least 10 years older than she was and probably married. All the good ones were. She took a few deep breaths and quickened her steps.

Rounding the last bend at the top of the hill, Cassie stopped in her tracks. Everything had changed. There were now several other houses built along the cliff road where before there'd been only windswept bush and, most worryingly of all, she was unable to see the old house. It was swaddled and hidden behind builders' hoardings.

Her heart sank and before she knew it, tears had sprung to her eyes. Although her family hadn't used the house in many years and it had passed through several owners, she suddenly realised how much of her history revolved around it through stories, told and retold over the years, and photographs now fading in ancient albums. Somewhere deep down she had harboured the hope of reclaiming it for herself and her own family and now, not only was the house going to be no more than a memory, children of her own seemed to be an increasingly unlikely possibility.

There were some horrible houses up here; concrete and glass constructions glaring into the teeth of the wind and rising like mini skyscrapers out of the sand. The thought of 'Heaven-Sent' being replaced by something similar broke her fragile heart. Aunt Louisa would have been distraught and Cassie felt a rush of relief that she would never have to know. >>

Ridiculous, she told herself, to react like that to a total stranger

The makeshift gate to the property, although solid, was not securely locked and the site was deserted. Cassie pushed open a space just wide enough to sidle through and stopped: the house looked virtually unchanged. The wide wrap-around veranda was still there, only wider and timber-decked. The symmetry and sash windows remained intact while the old shingle roof had been raised, allowing for what seemed to be a second storey.

Climbing over rubble, she eased through the front door and found herself awestruck. Columns of light flooded through skylights into a double-volume living area, exposed lime-washed beams soared intricately into the roof space and huge glass doors, still unfinished, opened into a wind-sheltered courtyard at the back. Even Louisa would have approved.

"You seem to like it." Cassie almost levitated with fright, dropping her camera and water bottle in the process. Leaning against the door frame, he seemed to have materialised out of the salty sea air. His voice, betraying a British accent, sounded amused and he put out a steadying hand and handed back her sandy possessions as though he was quite used to finding trespassers on his property.

"I love it," Cassie breathed, trying to collect herself. "I was afraid to find it ruined but it's gorgeous."

"I particularly wanted to capture certain views," he explained. "Some seemed to have special significance."

Cassie, looking down at the old stone bench still doggedly clinging to the cliff edge, realised she was seeing one of Louisa's sketches from just a slightly different perspective. He motioned her towards a workbench and pointed to a pile of old letters. "I've drawn a lot on their contents; they were among the last my grandfather wrote and this place seemed to have made a great impression on him. My grandmother said he didn't sound quite himself and maybe he knew what was coming, but I think that he experienced something special here and that it was



something of a haven for him."

"A haven?" Cassie pulled herself back to the present.

"From the war. He was hosted here by a local family while his ship was in Port Elizabeth for repair. He was en route to Suez and never made it home to Britain."

For the second time that morning Cassie's heart gave a little jolt. "I think," she said, "I have a photograph you need to see..."

Many introductions and explanations later, Cassie found herself promising to meet him for lunch back at the hotel, bringing with her Great Aunt Louisa's envelope. Nick had been intrigued by her stories of Louisa and eventually Cassie had even ventured to tell him that her Aunt was at that very moment resting in her well-travelled jewellery pouch on Cassie's dressing table, patiently waiting to be launched on her final journey.

A lot had depended on Nick's reaction to that little story but to Cassie's relief he had simply thrown back his head and laughed. "Bring her down for a drink!" he'd said.

Cassie balked at that but she gave the pouch a little pat before picking up the envelope and going downstairs. He was already there and once again her heart betrayed her, giving a little skip as he smiled at her across the table. Giving herself something to do, she carefully spread out the contents on the table and noticed how his eyes immediately lit up on

seeing the delicately rendered sketches. But as she eased the pebble, pansy shells and other bits and pieces out of the way, she heard his sudden intake of breath.

"I have no idea who this is," she said, touching the faded photograph. "It's not one of my family members."

"That is," replied Nick, "because it's one of mine. It's my grandfather."

For a few seconds it seemed time stood still, and then like the shifting shapes in a kaleidoscope, a thousand little pieces suddenly fell into place.

Lunch melted into afternoon tea as their conversation meandered down the paths that had led them both to this remote intersection. Shadows lengthened across the veranda and the fisherman husbands returned, sunburned and triumphant, to their waiting wives. And then Mr Ward appeared: "Thought you'd want this before sunset," he said, handing over the picnic basket Cassie had left with him earlier. "Popped in two of everything," he added quietly in Cassie's ear. Nick stood up and stretched out his hand. "Let's get back up to the cliffs," he said, smiling. "Somehow I think Great Aunt Louisa will be happy to leave now." By the time they reached the cliff top, the wind had dropped and the sea stretched calmly to the distant horizon.

On the old stone bench the picnic basket rested between them, its contents arranged around the sequined jewellery bag which Cassie now gently extracted. It was a relief to have someone else to open the Champagne and it was unexpectedly comforting to have someone to share this suddenly poignant ritual with her. She wasn't quite sure whether she had come to the end of a journey or if she was just starting out on a new one. She rather hoped it was the latter.

Carefully unzipping the velvet pouch, she took out a handful of the slightly gritty ashes. She wavered for a second and then, with Nick's arm loosely around her shoulders, cast it, tentatively at first and then with a sudden surge of joy, over the edge of the world. Drifting out over the water, the cloud of dust caught the long, low rays of the setting sun and, in a sudden shower of tiny falling stars, Great Aunt Louisa was finally on her way. **w&h**