



★ **A House Is a Body: Stories**

Shruti Swamy

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Powered by intense imagery and jolts of frank sexuality, Shruti Swamy's *A House Is a Body* blurs the line between fantastical and naturalistic storytelling with its tales of love, loss, and life lived across cultures.

"Blindness" sets the tone: a married woman imagines forking destinies for herself and her family as visions of death and alternate lives shift and shape her story. "Mourners" is another delicate, incisive family drama; in it, a widower and his wife's sister discover an unusual connection through their shared grief.

In "My Brother at the Station," a traumatic childhood incident bleeds into the present as a sister comes upon her estranged brother. In "Wedding Season," two lesbian lovers attend a relative's wedding in India, leading to the melancholic realization that they will never enjoy a traditional marriage celebration or family acceptance of their relationship.

The stories easily shift between continents and cultures. "The Siege" takes on mythological overtones, chronicling destructive battles between gods, even as a gentle message of feminine solidarity emerges. In "Earthly Pleasures," the collection's centerpiece story, absurdity mixes with bittersweet epiphanies as a dissatisfied Indian American artist befriends the god Krishna, who prefers to lounge around in jeans and give her the third degree on why her life is such a mess. In other pieces, including "The Neighbors" and "The House Is a Body," seemingly placid suburban lives are upended by unexpected emotional revelations and environmental calamities.

Throughout, Swamy's sensuous style illuminates her characters' thoughts and actions, easily accommodating a wide range of moods, from understated tragedy to more surreal flights of fancy. Just like the loyal housedog and cobra who duel in the concluding, fable-like "Night Garden," Swamy dances on the boundaries between life and death, and between ennui and irrevocable change, with mesmerizing results.

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