



★ **The Home of the Drowned**

Elin Anna Labba

Elizabeth Clark Wessel, Translator

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About home and migration in the face of displacement, Elin Anna Labba's haunting, elegant novel *The Home of the Drowned* memorializes indigenous Sámi culture in Lapland.

Three Sámi women—Iŋgá; her mother, Rávdná; and her Aunt Áne—confront the devastation of their flooded homeland as they are forced to relocate on repeat. Rávdná exhibits fierce determination to build a permanent home, but her attempts to secure a housing loan are rebuffed. She calls in a reporter who describes her community as “Northern Sweden’s East End.”

Perpetuated hegemonic violence is rendered in subtle terms herein: being nomadic and being forced to be nomadic are different, the book notes. Anne bears the symbolic burden through grief for her deceased daughter and for all that the Sámi lost due to economic expansion, colonization, and modernity. Iŋgá bears witness, heeding the inexorable call of the future even as she mourns the past, symbolized by the drowning of her father’s grave.

Balance and human resilience are throughlines in this story about a community redefining its relationship with nature. The lake made by the dam is luminous, omnipresent, and menacing throughout, representing polysemous meanings. Against this backdrop, the disappearance of entire Sámi villages is heartrending. Still, the Sámis’ relationship with land is witnessed in their daily lives: someone rescues a rabbit litter; people follow the reindeer migration. Elements of Sámi culture, including makeshift huts, clothing, handicrafts, fishing life, and joik singing showcased by interspersed prose-poems, are incorporated in a seamless manner, commemorating their vitality within the community.

The Home of the Drowned is an exultant, elegiac novel about the healing power of home, seen through a community’s experiences in the wake of environmental challenges.

ELAINE CHIEW (May / June 2026)

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