

★ **These Bodies**

Morgan Christie

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In the whirling, spirited short stories of Morgan Christie's *These Bodies*, familiar concerns meet metaphorical otherworldliness.

Unable to find seasoning salt anywhere in town, a woman finds a store on a previously unseen street; she happens into a bizarre encounter wherein hair strands are the only currency. In "The Panther," a confused, conflicted, and newly pregnant young girl faces her rapidly changing future, though the baby's father isn't who everyone assumes he is.

Elsewhere, an alcoholic father tries, fails, and tries again to keep control over his household—and himself. A woman finds direction from her chance sighting of a wildlife standoff in "Coyote," translating it into a sign to stand up to her manager at work. Her self-assertion takes a surprising turn, and has implications for her personal relationship, too. Magnificent, layered suspense makes it difficult not to peek ahead in "Monkey Paws," wherein a relationship that's mired in personal differences faces a new crack when one partner believes he has brought home a new chimp to hide in the attic.

These stories are transportative, communicating through embedded themes that are woven in with gentleness. The writing is easygoing; complexity comes in the narratives' developments. Strong characterizations result in a collection populated by all types of people, their intricacies a mirror of reality. These realities are confronted by some magical elements, too, but always reflect real-world concerns. Masterful and purposeful, each story goes beyond the mere novelties of its developments to comment on something true.

Devour *These Bodies*, which is a brilliant collection of stories, but also allot additional time to meditate on them; they are an opportunity for an immersive literary experience.

TANISHA RULE (January / February 2021)

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