



## Her Body and Other Parties

*Carmen Maria Machado*

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

# Her Body and Other Parties

Carmen Maria Machado

**Her Body and Other Parties** Carmen Maria Machado

**Finalist for the National Book Award for Fiction**

In *Her Body and Other Parties*, Carmen Maria Machado blithely demolishes the arbitrary borders between psychological realism and science fiction, comedy and horror, fantasy and fabulism. While her work has earned her comparisons to Karen Russell and Kelly Link, she has a voice that is all her own. In this electric and provocative debut, Machado bends genre to shape startling narratives that map the realities of women's lives and the violence visited upon their bodies.

A wife refuses her husband's entreaties to remove the green ribbon from around her neck. A woman recounts her sexual encounters as a plague slowly consumes humanity. A salesclerk in a mall makes a horrifying discovery within the seams of the store's prom dresses. One woman's surgery-induced weight loss results in an unwanted houseguest. And in the bravura novella "Especially Heinous," Machado reimagines every episode of *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, a show we naïvely assumed had shown it all, generating a phantasmagoric police procedural full of doppelgängers, ghosts, and girls with bells for eyes.

Earthy and otherworldly, antic and sexy, queer and caustic, comic and deadly serious, *Her Body and Other Parties* swings from horrific violence to the most exquisite sentiment. In their explosive originality, these stories enlarge the possibilities of contemporary fiction.

## Her Body and Other Parties Details

Date : Published October 3rd 2017 by Graywolf Press

ISBN :

Author : Carmen Maria Machado

Format : Kindle Edition 248 pages

Genre : Short Stories, Fiction, Fantasy, Horror, Feminism, Magical Realism

 [Download Her Body and Other Parties ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Her Body and Other Parties ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online Her Body and Other Parties Carmen Maria Machado**

---

## From Reader Review Her Body and Other Parties for online ebook

### Jenny (Reading Envy) says

I ordered this for my library but grew impatient and listened to it on Hoopla instead. It is one of the finalists for the 2017 National Book Award (USA.)

This is a book of short stories, all centering around the female body, as evidenced by the title. This would not be a book for anyone who shocks easily, as there is sex, a lot of sex, some of it queer sex, and some of it deals with the aftermath of sexual assault. Some of the themes are disturbing, and the insertion at times of supernatural or fantastical elements make many of the stories feel even more dangerous than real life, or maybe it's that they highlight the danger of real life. The writing is powerful and I would not be surprised to see this win the award, although I'm still slightly more on board with *Sing, Unburied, Sing*.

Story by story:

**The Husband Stitch** - This is a retelling of *The Girl with the Ribbon Around her Neck*, but somehow the husband is more domineering, and the lengthening of the story brings you more into her point of view.

**Inventory** - A list of sexual encounters inside the context of a world falling apart due to a virus. This might be my favorite!

**Mothers** - A disturbing story where I couldn't tell what was real and what was not. A baby delivered by her lesbian partner, told "this is your baby," But then she is running through the park after stranger babies...

**Especially Heinous** - I could not understand what was going on here, and had to stop and look up some info about the book. The author has taken every episode of SVU, the show that focuses on sex crimes, usually against women, and builds an alternative story where women have bell eyes and something supernatural is going on and I just didn't really get it at all. I'm sure if I had any familiarity at all with SVU the characters at least would make sense to me, but this was rough. And since it was in audio, I couldn't tell if this was a series of very short stories (flash stories) or what I was encountering, because the author keeps the title of each episode and then has a paragraph or a sentence after each. I wish it had an intro or something, at least to navigate the audio version.

**Real Women Have Bodies** - If women really grew invisible....

**Eight Bites** - Well I'm not quite sure, but I think this is about weight loss surgery and the sacrifice of thin and what it does to our daughters? It's rather frightening.

**The Resident** - This one examines whether female writers are allowed to write about themselves the same way male writers are, what makes something art, how much autonomy do you have as a creative person?

**Difficult at Parties** - A woman has gone through severe trauma and starts hearing the thoughts of actors on film.. and in the background, a spouse trying desperately to help.

---

### Elyse says

It's 3am...

I really need to fall back to sleep ...  
but I couldn't stop reading these stories so before I drift off..  
I'll just say a few things...  
ITS NOT FOR THE TIMID....

I had read two of the stories yesterday and couldn't stop talking to Paul about them on our hike yesterday. I was trying to figure them out. They are easy to read - but requires our interpretation.  
I just now finished the rest... some were even harder to wrap my head around. These are literary - kinda brilliant- short stories-which a classroom discussion could enhance.

Lots of SEX..so let's just get that out there ....  
However sex in these stories is a broad word.

The writing is beautiful- gorgeous- addictive- intense - elegant - powerful - disturbing- erotic - heartbreaking- horrific -

Women are vulnerable- their souls are split open - there is a sense of doom -

I still don't understand all of these stories and I'm not sure I'm suppose to... and a few I liked more than others

Paul and I discussed the symbolism of a green ribbon -  
We talked about a story 'Inventory' .... sex partners....  
The last story - ( I knew it was from rape) - but it's not graphic..... left me hurting,

At the same time there is life energy in these stories through women's bodies....beautiful women's bodies...

A thought provoking unique collection of stories by one hell of a gifted artistic writer ....  
I'm left breathless!!!!

---

## **Roxane says**

The stories in Carmen Maria Machado's Her Body and Other Parties vibrate with originality, queerness, sensuality and the strange. Her voracious imagination and extraordinary voice beautifully bind these stories about fading women and the end of the world and men who want more when they've been given everything and bodies, so many human bodies taking up space and straining the seams of skin in impossible, imperfect, unforgettable ways.

---

## **Amalia Gavea says**

*“What magical thing could you want so badly they take you away from the known world for wanting it?”*

This book is one of those cases when you feel someone calling your name. From the enticing cover to the cryptic tale. Naturally, this being a short story collection falling into Literary Fiction, Magical Realism and Gender Studies, finding itself in my hands was unavoidable. This proved to be a very special, extreme adventure.

Machado writes with bravery, clarity, and confidence, centering her stories on sexuality and beauty from the perspective of women who do not follow the flow or adjust to society's demands and conformities. In frank, open, haunting writing, she stresses how the body becomes a projection of the way women have been viewed- and are still viewed- in our societies. Beauty, sexuality, everything is preconceived, even in our modern, sophisticated world. More so now, I believe. Many support- either consciously or not- that you must change when you are different or you will find yourself ostracised. This notion was obviously much more common in the past. In my opinion, today we have a different kind of isolation. The psychological imprisonment, the bullying, the feeling that you simply aren't good enough. We let others decide and throw parties on our bodies and our souls. Why? Because we need acceptance. What if we don't find fit the image of beauty and grace others have already cultivated for us?

***The Husband Stitch*** : A woman, born with a green ribbon on her neck, finds love and creates a beautiful family. Or does she? A dark tale that becomes darker with references to urban legends and tragic folk myths. Absolutely brilliant.

***Inventory*** : A woman remembers past lovers as a deathly virus is slowly destroying the country.

***Mothers*** : A very complex story, centered around a horribly dysfunctional relationship, where reality blends with the memories of a shattered mind. This is one of the most powerful moments in the collection.

***“Stabler never told Benson about his little brother. But he also never told her about his older brother, which was understandable, because he didn't know about him, either”*** (If this isn't perfect sarcasm, I don't know what is...)

***Especially Heinous*** : Machado imagines plot lines for episodes of the TV series *Law and Order: SVU* or whatever its name is. Frankly, they are so much better than the actual episodes of the actual series. The only problem is I found this to be completely irrelevant to the overall tone of the collection but it was hugely entertaining.

***Real Women Have Bodies*** : Women become mist. Suddenly and without any comprehensible cause. They turn invisible while clothes become alive. This is a story of the complex relationship between us and our bodies which become even more perplexing as we grow up. Body positivity, anorexia, the notion adopted by many men that our bodies are theirs to use as they see fit since the beginning of time. Who and what decides how a “real” woman should look like? This is such a beautiful, tragic tale with a beautiful relationship at its heart and haunting descriptions of the misty women.

***“Foxes wove through the streets at night. There was a white one among them, sleek and fast, and she looked like the ghost of the others.”***

***Eight Bites*** : One of the most profound stories in the collection. Young women have to undergo surgeries to remain thin. Eight bites. That's what they can eat. Eight bites to keep the perfect body intact.

***“Do you ever worry”, she asked me, “that you're the madwoman in the attic?”***

***The Resident*** : This is the most perplexing story in the collection. It gave me quite a lot of trouble in trying to classify it so to speak. A woman finds herself in an old-fashioned hotel, occupied by bohemian artists that are not what they seem. Is it a horror story? An allegory? Probably a combination of the two. It is certainly haunting, sensual and atmospheric but I didn't find it particularly interesting. If anything, it seemed a bit pretentious.

***Difficult at Parties*** : A story of trauma, abuse and obsession that crosses the lines. I found parts of this tale distasteful and, for me, this was the dud of the collection.

Despite the (very) few issues, this is a raw, haunting, brave collection. I recommend it without any hesitation but I don't think it is for everyone. If you are uncomfortable with certain dark thematic elements, there's a

chance you may not enjoy it. However, I know that most of us are brave readers, attracted to dark and controversial themes and to books that make us think....

*“There are strange evenings when the sun sets but it rains anyway, and the sky is gold and peach and also gray and purple like a bruise. Every morning, a fine mist coats the grove. Some nights, a bloody harvest moon rises over the horizon and stains the clouds like an alien sunrise.”*

My reviews can also be found on <https://theopinionatedreaderblog.word...>

---

## Navidad Thelamour says

### 2.5 stars

Carmen Maria Machado's *Her Body and Other Parties* is a collection I was so excited to read I dragged a friend in to read it with me. We handed off back and forth who got to pick the next story, never going in order, and found ourselves surprisingly disappointed by each one.

In all honesty, I was *drawn* to what Machado was trying to do here, to what she was trying to say. But, she didn't say it with enough force. Some of her stories, such as "Real Women Have Bodies" and "Eight Bites" seemed to not amount to much more than a harsh whisper, if that, never fully realizing themselves. I wanted more--**MORE** from a voice that dared to tackle such bold topics as the female experience and psyche. And by "more" I don't mean argumentative or domineering in tone; some of my favorite short stories *ever* crept up on me with a gentle breeze at my neck only to bowl me over in the end with words just as gentle. Machado and *Her Body* didn't do that for me. In fact, what I remember most about this collection is my buddy reader's and my disappointed-mounting-to-annoyed reaction as each story was read and discussed. For such a topic that spoke to us, we both wanted to learn something, to feel something--*something*. This collection just fell flat in so many ways.

Here's what I will say: Carmen Maria Machado clearly has something to say, though I, myself, didn't hear it loudly enough. I *thoroughly* enjoyed her use of Gothic elements--vaguely supernatural devices used to convey her thoughts, to tinge her messages in wonder. Yet, some of her works were too referential without adding enough to the conversation to warrant the blatant references (to "The Girl with the Ribbon Around her Neck" and *Law & Order: SVU* in particular). "The Husband Stitch" was my favorite story, because of the unique and haunting asides inserted into the narrative, but the ending failed to shock or move me, so even that story did not live up to the hype around this collection. Every story I read left me wishing there was more--not length but meat and substance, not words but voice and resonance. As we all know, fabulously original ideas must, too, be supported by the execution of them, and *that* I did not see impressively done here. 2.5\*

### FOLLOW ME AT:

The Navi Review Blog | Twitter | Instagram

---

## Simon says

A crazy sometimes conflicting collection of fabulist tales. When this collection works, on tales of women with ribbons on their bodies, sexual encounters during a world ending epidemic, women literally vanishing

in their skin and people who can hear the inner thoughts of adult film stars when they are watching porn, it is amazing. But occasionally like with a twist on an America hit series and all it's nine seasons of episodes or a tale of mothers that gets too other, it lost me a touch. That said the brilliance won over. It's a crazy, creepy, queer, quirky, fantastical, fabulist, sinister and sexual collection, read it.

---

## Melanie says

This collection of short stories heavily emphasizes the violence that we put on women's bodies. Whether it be sexual violence, physical violence, violence put on us by society, or violence we put on ourselves. This entire collection is absolutely haunting in the best way possible. I won't forget this collection, ever. And these are all so queer, and so feminist, and invoked so many emotions from me. Carmen Maria Machado is beyond words talented, and I feel so very blessed to even have been able to read this.

I'm going to break down each short story with my thoughts, opinions, and individual star rating!

### ► THE HUSBAND STITCH - ★★★★★

This is my second time reading this, and it is just as powerful and hard hitting as it was the first time around. You can read this for free from Granta!, and I implore each and every one of you who is reading this review to do yourself a favor and read this short story.

This story is very feminist and very sexually explicit, but so damn important. It's about the life of a woman, who gives everything to men and never is allowed to keep anything for herself. It's about life's expectations on women, and how society shapes the choices we do and do not have. It's about how, no matter what, giving everything will never be good enough as a woman. It's about enjoying and exploring your sexuality, yet trying to cope with the shame. It's about never fully being able to become the person you are, but becoming the person your husband and/or family require you to be. It's about having children, who will just repeat the same vicious and unfair cycle. **This is my favorite short story of all time** and it deserves all the stars that Goodreads and every other book rating site has to offer.

### ► INVENTORY - ★★★★★

This is essentially an inventory list of all the sexual encounters this particular woman has had during her thirty years while her world escalates into chaos. I loved looking at this sexual exploration, journey, and acceptance. And it evoked such raw emotion from me. I just didn't think it was as hard hitting as some of the others in the collection.

Also, if you enjoyed this short story, please check out *The Book of the Unnamed Midwife* by Meg Elison! I honestly can't recommend it enough, and both stories have a similar theme, feeling, and hauntingness to them.

### ► MOTHERS - ★★★

This is a very metaphorical story that starts out with a woman being given a baby by her female lover that they created unbeknownst to the narrator. And I use the word narrator very loosely, because this story is very unreliable. You will constantly be unsure of what is real and what is not, but you slowly get to see a story unfold. I also wholeheartedly believe that this story is very open for interpretation, and what I got from it could be, and probably is, something very different from what you were able to take from it. And that in and of itself is beyond words beautiful.

### ► ESPECIALLY HEINOUS - ★★

This is a retelling of each season and episode of *Law & Order: SVU* that dips into the realm of the

paranormal, but because I have never seen that show (I know, I know) I don't think I got that much enjoyment out of this one. I still thought it was so very smartly written, and it has that haunting feeling that I know associate with Carmen Maria Machado, but I just wasn't as in love with this as I feel others will be.

► **REAL WOMEN HAVE BODIES** - ★★★★★

This story felt like a punch to the gut over and over and over. Words can be so powerful, and Carmen Maria Machado has perfected the craft of writing, I swear. Women in this world fade slowly and eventually become invisible. We get to see a dress shop, that puts youth and beautiful before all else, and a few of the workers are grasping to those values. Growing older, and feeling less valuable because of it, is a concept that many people in this world can't deal with, without having to turn invisible. And I'm not going to lie to you and say that when I read that one of the characters of this book was twenty-nine that I didn't try to suppress that visceral feeling that I don't even have words for, but I wish so badly that I didn't feel.

► **EIGHT BITES** - ★★★★★

First and foremost, this short story would be so very triggering for anyone who has battled any form of eating disorder before, so please use caution before reading this one. Food and body obsession is so very real, and people will go their entire lives never knowing peace with themselves because of it. This is a story about a woman who has struggled her entire life and has finally decided to get bariatric surgery. This story also heavily talks about how we pass these terrible feelings and values down to our daughters and other generations, over and over.

► **THE RESIDENT** - ★★★

Like most of the stories in this collection, this story felt really personal to read. Like, autobiographical personal. This is about a woman who goes up to the mountains, where she also spent some of her youth as a Girl Scout, to work on her novel among other artists. We slowly get to see the writer slowly comes undone by her past and her present, but also embraces and comes to terms with who she is and how she is. It's a beautiful mixture that I think most humans will really resonate with.

► **DIFFICULT AT PARTIES** - ★★★

This was probably the most raw feeling story for me, and it really left me feeling empty. This is about a woman dealing, coping, and trying to heal with the aftermath of a sexual assault. Between others trying to help her, to hoping her assailant is found, and trying to find some sort of peace within herself, she is using pornography as a healing mechanism. Again, this is going to really be hard for a lot of people to read, but it's also going to hit home for so many readers that need stories like this.

I really loved this collection, and I gave *Her Body and Other Parties* 4 stars overall, because out of a possible 40 stars (5 stars possible for each of the 8 stories) this collection accumulated 31 stars (77%). Please pick this up, this is such an important book for everyone to read, and I can't recommend it enough.

[Blog](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Tumblr](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Youtube](#) | [Twitch](#)

Buddy read with Lilly, Elise, & Destiny! ♥

---

**Mackenzi says**

\*long keening noise only uttered in the shadow of a perfect book\*

## Riley says

Actual rating: 3.5

Individual ratings:

The Husband Stitch - 5 (by far my favorite in the collection)

Inventory - 4.5

Mothers - 3

Especially Heinous - 2

Real Women Have Bodies - 3.5

Eight Bites - 4

The Resident - 3

Difficult at Parties - 4

---

## Larry H says

I'd rate this 4.5 stars.

If you think of works of fiction like works of art, Carmen Maria Machado's debut story collection, *Her Body and Other Parties*, is an abstract painting. It's undoubtedly gorgeous and attention-getting, there's no one right way to interpret the things you see (or read), everyone will see something different in it, and each time you look, you'll catch something you didn't see the first time. You may also find yourself wondering, "What did that mean?"

Seven of the eight stories in this collection are a mesmerizing combination of atmosphere, sexuality, emotion, and gorgeous, gorgeous storytelling. There is also a strange undercurrent of creepiness running through many of the stories. I'll admit I was a little bit nervous while reading, and I kept waiting for something horrible, for a bogeyman to reveal itself, or some shocking event to occur. That tension is almost addictive, because you want to keep on reading, wondering just what Machado has up her sleeve.

The stories that stood out the most for me were "Inventory," in which a woman recounts her sexual exploits as the world is slowly being consumed by an unexplained plague; "Real Women Have Bodies," where a young woman working at a prom dress shop makes a shocking discovery about what makes the store's gowns so unique; "Eight Bites," about a woman visited by an unwanted houseguest after weight loss surgery; the immensely creepy "The Resident," in which a writer at an artist's colony has trouble with the lines blurring between past and present, fact and fiction; and the sexy, mysterious "The Husband Stitch," where a woman's husband has been begging her for years to remove the green ribbon from around her neck, but she never has.

The one story, which is more of a novella, that absolutely didn't work for me, was "Especially Heinous," a spoof of sorts of *Law and Order: SVU*, which provided brief synopses of 272 episodes of the show, adding supernatural elements, ramping up the show's sexual tension and emotional instability, and throwing in some mundane twists as well. I just didn't get it, and it dragged on far too long for me, but I've seen other reviews refer to this as the best in the collection, so what do I know?

*Her Body and Other Parties* is a finalist for the National Book Award for Fiction, and it is truly the debut of

a dazzling, fearless new voice in the world of short stories. While I wish I could talk to someone about what they think happened in some of the stories, I honestly can't stop thinking about the worlds Machado created, and how masterfully she reeled me into them.

This isn't a collection for those who like their stories to be more straightforward, or those uncomfortable with sex scenes both implied and explicit, but if you're in the mood for some genre-defying fiction, pick up this collection. You'll get to witness the start of what is sure to be an incredible career.

See all of my reviews at <http://itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blo...>

---

## Emily May says

This is a difficult review to write because I have a lot of mixed feelings.

Her Body and Other Parties is like most short story collections I have read in that some of the stories worked for me far more than others. It is **a strange, experimental, feminist collection** that often crosses into fantasy, dystopia and/or magical realism. Some of the stories stepped out of the land of weird into, I feel, the land of nonsensical and absurdist. I liked these stories less than the others.

Perhaps it is somewhat plebeian of me to say so, but I preferred the stories with actual, you know, *stories* and a structural narrative. My favourites were the much-lauded "The Husband Stitch", "Eight Bites", and "Difficult At Parties".

"The Husband Stitch" is a retelling of "The Green Ribbon" with emphasis on the demands men and society place on women, and their sense of entitlement toward women's bodies. I especially liked how the author played around with form, including stage directions for the reader who is "reading this story out loud".

"Eight Bites" is about a woman's relationship with food and her fat self as she considers and then gets bariatric surgery. Machado's evocative writing really worked when delving into a food/body obsession.

"Difficult At Parties" - about a woman trying to deal with the aftermath of sexual assault by watching porn - is another narrative that got right under my skin.

I also enjoyed "The Resident", in which an artist's retreat in the mountains leads to a writer slowly coming undone. It contained a darkly comical line that is one of my favourite quotes in the collection:

*"Do you ever worry," she asked me, "that you're the madwoman in the attic?"*

"Mothers", on the other hand, was a bit too abstract for me. I'd be lying if I claimed to really understand what happened. Though my least favourites were "Inventory" and "Especially Heinous". The former lists the narrator's sexual experiences throughout her life in snippets, as a vague post-apocalyptic scenario plays out in the background.

"Especially Heinous" should have been called "Especially Tedious". It rewrites the episode plot summaries for twelve seasons of *Law & Order: SVU* in snippets that gave me flashbacks to Lincoln in the Bardo. It's just page after page of disconnected plot summaries that didn't come together and do anything. I wanted it to end.

However, just in general - and this can hardly be considered Machado's fault - I am growing a little tired of

these feminist tales that hold such a grim definition of womanhood and femininity. Where we are painted as humans owned in parts by various men and corporations, where sex is cold and passionless, where we are seen to be masturbating furiously whenever our vaginas aren't bleeding, which seems to be 80% of the time with all the hymens, birthing and, of course, menstruation. Maybe this is to make women seem harder, more brutal, less maternal and nurturing and cuddly and weak... but it's a bleak alternative.

This book, in particular, is heavy on the sex. I have no problem with sex and sexuality, but it's extremely detached and unemotional. It's an orgasm with a straight face. It's this quote from "Real Women Have Bodies" when the narrator's girlfriend is dying/fading:

*"We have never fucked with such urgency as we do in these weeks, but she is fading more and feeling less. She comes infrequently."*

It is sometimes very strange how sex and coming are the most important things in scenes where it seems like far more important things are happening. It made it especially difficult to read through "Inventory", which is little more than a repetitive listing of unsexy sex throughout a woman's life.

My personal thoughts about the direction of feminist lit aside, I thought Her Body and Other Parties was pretty mixed overall. I would recommend Gay's Difficult Women, 404 Ink's Nasty Women or Enriquez's Things We Lost in the Fire before this book. Though some stories are definitely worth checking out.

[Blog](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Youtube](#)

---

## Blair says

In her debut collection of short stories, Carmen Maria Machado mingles fabulism, body horror, erotica and feminist commentary. The thrust of *Her Body and Other Parties* is perhaps best encapsulated by the second story in the book, 'Inventory'. It starts with the narrator cataloguing everyone she's slept with, taking on that now-near-compulsory clinical tone, that Muumuu House type of thing of talking endlessly about sex but doing so in an affectless style that doesn't communicate any passion or joy or pleasure. It suddenly becomes more interesting when a hidden narrative emerges: as the narrator progresses through her later conquests, she talks of a pervasive virus, family members lost, a quarantine zone, evacuations and refugees. It's an unexpected approach to the dystopian theme and a pleasing subversion of first impressions, yet the story as a whole remains unsatisfying.

Then there's the much-discussed and multi-award-nominated 'The Husband Stitch', a modern fable which updates the campfire tale 'The Green Ribbon'. Like the original, it is a horror story with a gruesome twist, but the true horrors here are ordinary ones: the husband's insistence that the wife have nothing of her own; the titular stitch itself. In striving for a fairytale flavour, Machado uses a mannered voice that renders her narrator smug and oddly prudish even as she recounts exhausting quantities of sex (a recurring motif, as you may already have guessed). I did enjoy her wry stage directions: 'If you are reading this story out loud, move aside the curtain to illustrate this final point to your listeners. It'll be raining, I promise.'

Among the weaker stories is 'Especially Heinous', which reimagines plot summaries of *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* episodes through a surrealist lens, playing on the ubiquity of violence against women in such shows. This starts out as a cute absurdist gimmick, but it's about five times longer than it needs to be. Some images (the ghosts with bells for eyes; the grotesque secret of the dresses in 'Real Women Have Bodies') just don't make enough sense to work, much less shock. There's always an emptiness, something missing. (And there are so many instances of 'inside of' in these stories – inside of me, inside of her, inside of

him, I swear it feels like every other paragraph in some stories. I wish an editor had taken their scalpel to those 'of's.)

My favourite was 'The Resident'. While the subject matter is slightly more staid than some of the others – presumably semi-autobiographical in its portrait of a writer unravelling during a retreat – it's a relief that it isn't told at a cold, impersonal remove. It actually has heart and a personality, unlike so many of the others, and contains one of the few truly rousing scenes in the book, when the narrator lashes out at a patronising acquaintance and defends her right to write about 'crazy' heroines and madwomen in attics. This could be read as a manifesto for the collection as a whole (but isn't enough to save it). Also strong is 'Eight Bites', in which the weight the protagonist loses through bariatric surgery takes on a life of its own.

It's difficult to articulate without sounding like an idiot who's missed the point entirely, but there's something I find so depressing about the kind of writing that's ostensibly feminist but seems to focus incessantly on the negatives of being a woman. In fiction such as this, the approach is often paired with candid-yet-detached writing about sex that I also find offputting (not to mention extremely unsexy). The stories are well-crafted and (when they don't feel workshopped to death) spark with strong ideas and entertaining metafictional touches, but *Her Body and Other Parties* didn't work for me the way I hoped it would.

If you enjoyed this I'd recommend the following (all short story collections):

*Things We Lost in the Fire* by Mariana Enríquez

*The Doll's Alphabet* by Camilla Grudova

*Intimations* by Alexandra Kleeman

*Homesick for Another World* by Ottessa Moshfegh

*The Babysitter at Rest* by Jen George

*I received an advance review copy of Her Body and Other Parties from the publisher through NetGalley.*

[TinyLetter](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Tumblr](#)

---

## Elise (TheBookishActress) says

*“I choose this life,” the prostitute says to the social worker. “I do. Please put your energy into helping girls who aren’t here by choice.” She is so right. She is murdered anyway.*

### Strange, visceral, but altogether, just too confusing for me.

I would recommend this to those who loved the metaphorical side of Roxane Gay's *Difficult Women*. (Before you ask, I was not one of those people.) Because these stories... well, you're not going to enjoy them unless you *get* them, at least partially.

And to be quite honest, some of my disappointment was just plain **too-high expectations**. *The Husband Stitch* was the only Machado I'd read before, and I *adored* it. I expected something even better. It is the only five I gave within this collection.

I feel like some asshole on twitter is going to find this book and decide to call everyone who didn't get this a typical straight feminist or whatever, so to clarify: I'm a huge lesbian and the women kissing were not the confusing part. I really appreciated how unapologetically queer this collection is, and would definitely recommend it in my stack of great queer fiction.

? The Husband Stitch - ★★★★★

I read this *twice* earlier due to Melanie's awesome recommendation. This is a story about being consumed, losing your own agency, and how much you can give before you break. One thing is clear, though; **it's worth the read**. There were a few metaphors here I only understood on the second and third reads due to sheer exhaustion, which is really upsetting - I feel like this would be my fave story ever otherwise. You can read this story here.

? Inventory - ★★★★★?

A story of a woman's sex life as a plague destroys her world. Honestly, I don't even know what this was. Okay, I do; it's an exploration of how sex alone can reflect an environment. There's this sort of raw quality to it, but I can't say it ever really got under my skin, and the character work could've been far stronger.

? Mothers - ★★★★★?

No summary. Uhhh... somebody please explain what the hell this story's ending means? Because I honest to god do not understand. I think I kind of loved it, though. Maybe worth a reread.

? Especially Heinous - ★★★★★??

This is a slightly-too-long rundown of a series of Law and Order: SVU episodes. Using the real titles, Machado makes up an intriguing plot full of supernatural elements and twists. The ending of this worked perfectly for me, but the story itself was too long; twelve seasons is a lot of episodes and apparently, a lot of repetition. I got the point about dead prostitutes 30 pages in and at points it just kept going. Have to admit, though, that several of the episode descriptions will stay with me.

? Real Women Have Bodies - ★★★★★?

This story is one of women who become translucent over time. I really appreciated it; the detail is visceral and the emotion raw. It *is* far more metaphorical than I tend to prefer, though.

? Eight Bites - ★★★★★?

An exploration of disordered eating and fatphobia in society especially among women! and yet I also just didn't fucking understand 75% of this, so?

? The Resident - ★★★★★??

This one is about confronting your past and all it comes with. The thematic conclusions are good, but unfortunately, I felt it was a bit overly long.

? Difficult at Parties - ★★???

I ? didn't ? understand ? this ? at ? all ? what ? does ? it ? mean ?

ALL IN ALL: Good, but too metaphorical for my style and taste. I read one a night with Melanie and Destiny.

Blog | Goodreads | Twitter | Youtube

---

## Joe Valdez says

*Her Body and Other Parties* is the debut book by Carmen Maria Machado, whose movie reviews I was familiar with in the *Los Angeles Times*. Published in 2017, I bit on this short story collection with the publisher's promise of fiction that "borders between psychological realism and science fiction, comedy and horror, fantasy and fabulism." I found it to be rough in terms of quality control, a talented beginner trying

way too hard. The first and second of eight pieces are terrific but everything that follows alternates wildly between undeveloped workshop draft and smart ass social media post. Obscurity overwhelms clarity.

"The Husband Stitch" is the tale of a woman who wears a green ribbon around her neck that she never removes. At seventeen, she meets the man she'll marry, and manages to keep her ribbon and its secrets secure until their son goes off to college. The Writing (with a capital W, ugh) is style heavy--which should have been a red flag for me--but Machado did keep me unsettled throughout by grounding her story in the patterns of an old wives tale or urban legend. The piece has momentum and does lead the reader somewhere. For those like me who've never read Machado's fiction, this piece easily made me want to read more beguiling tales of women on the edge of reason.

"Inventory" is one woman's diary of her sexual partners. The seventh entry in her little black book indicates that all may not be right with the world as an epidemic spreads from Northern California, impacting each of her subsequent entries. This is bar none the best piece. After the style choice of diary format gets familiar, there's an actual story here. Machado's writing is fraught with tension and put me on edge. I wanted to know more about the world that was developing and how her narrator would survive it. This piece had me sold that I had a great debut book on my hands.

"Mothers" is about a woman whose bad romance (with a woman named Bad) culminates in her lover delivering a baby. It was not clear to me what the fuck was going on in this story. This is one of those pieces you discuss at book club, with everyone taking a turn describing what they think they read and together, you figure out what happened. Was there really a baby? Was the narrator really going crazy? What really happened in the house? Really? This sort of Writing is not for me and may not be for anyone who likes story and characters. Machado is also doing things in Capital Letters at this point. She seems to be trying too hard.

"Especially Heinous (272 Views of *Law & Order SVU*)" are little joke synopses of fake episodes of the long-running detective show. Apparently, Machado is a big time *SVU* fan and might have been compelled to write what she knows, but this is one most obnoxious things I've ever read in a book. A blog post or series of Tweets this dopey wouldn't have bothered me because social media and snark go hand in hand. As a fiction reader, though, I hate jokes. After three pages, I gave up and skipped to the next story, hoping that Machado might regain some quality control over the book. Not every pitch is going to be a strike ...

"Real Women Have Bodies" is about a college grad working at a Forever 21 type store in a mall. She's seduced by a girl who supplies the retailer with women's garments and in a twist that gets the book back on track, women around the world are becoming non-corporeal, losing their mass. This piece comes closest to having story and characters and I did find myself becoming affected by the romance. The dark fantasy conceit isn't given priority and Machado is still too vague to be completely satisfying, but this was a decent piece.

"Eight Bites" is about a woman who has a gastric-bypass type medical procedure and is sort of visited by the entity she shed. This conceit cannot hold the story built on top of it and on that basis, I checked out of it.

"The Resident" is about a woman who drives into the mountains to take part in a funded fellowship for writers and artists so she can finish her novel. The residency also happens to be on the same lake she attended Girls Scouts camp at. Of course, the woman will experience strange things. Of course, the reader will wonder if what she's experiencing is real or has some Meaning. Of course, I hated this.

"Difficult At Parties" is about a woman who experiencing some bad trauma coming home and trying to adjust. Her relationship with a man is as unclear as what happened to her or what she's experiencing.

*Her Body and Other Parties* may be best recommended for those who enjoy writing, with lots of meaningful themes intentionally woven into them. I can't think of anything worse to spend my time reading. Maybe an

alt-right manifesto. Some have described the book as "feminist," but I don't know what that means in terms of fiction. An author either creates a compelling story and characters, or she doesn't. There isn't a single piece in this book I'd want to tell someone about and for that reason, I can't recommend it. Machado errs on the side of obscurity, and errs a lot.

---

## **Hannah says**

I was really looking forward to this book, ever since I saw a review by Roxane Gay for this; then when I read and loved one of these short stories earlier this year I was even more excited - and I was not disappointed in the least. I absolutely adored these stories and what Carmen Maria Machado has to offer. She writes just the kind of slightly unsettling and very upsetting short stories that I just adore. Her stories are twisted and mean but also beautiful beyond words. They have a core feminist message while also being stylistically awesome and never losing sight of the humanity at the core of them. The stories are highly inventive, can be read both as a social commentary and often as love stories, her characters feel real and her language is precise and wonderful.

As is usually the case I adored some stories more than others but overall this was a very strong collection and I can absolutely understand the praise it has garnered (it has been blurbed by Roxane Gay and Jeff VanderMeer among others).

I loved "The Husband Stitch" (this is the story I had read before), maybe even more so the second time around: this inventive rumination on what secrets women are allowed to keep made me mad and sad at the same time.

In "Inventory" a woman looks back on her past lovers as the world comes to an literal end around her. This story felt very different than the rest of the collection but I loved its wistful melancholy and the bleak surrounding Carmen Maria Machado evoked.

My favourite of the bunch was the novella "Especially Heinous", written as short blurbs for a TV show (think "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit" ) filled with ghosts with bells for eyes and doppelgängers that are eerily similar but very creepy. This story was unsettling and creepy but also packed an immense emotional punch.

---