



You Feel So Mortal: Essays on the Body

Peggy Shinner

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Feet, bras, autopsies, hair—Peggy Shinner takes an honest, unflinching look at all of them in *You Feel So Mortal*, a collection of searing and witty essays about the body: her own body, female and Jewish; those of her parents, the bodies she came from; and the collective body, with all its historical, social, and political implications. What, she asks, does this whole mess of bones, muscles, organs, and soul mean? Searching for answers, she turns her keen narrative sense to body image, gender, ethnic history, and familial legacy, exploring what it means to live in our bodies and to leave them behind.

Over the course of twelve essays, Shinner holds a mirror up to the complex desires, fears, confusions, and mysteries that shape our bodily perceptions. Driven by the collision between herself and the larger world, she examines her feet through the often-skewed lens of history to understand what makes them, in the eyes of some, decidedly Jewish; considers bras, breasts, and the storied skills of the bra fitter; asks, from the perspective of a confused and grieving daughter, what it means to cut the body open; and takes a reeling time-trip through myth, culture, and history to look at women's hair in ancient Rome, Laos, France, Syria, Cuba, India, and her own past. Some pieces investigate the body under emotional or physical duress, while others use the body to consider personal heritage and legacy. Throughout, Shinner writes with elegance and assurance, weaving her wide-ranging thoughts into a firm and fascinating fabric.

Turning the category of body books on, well, its ear, *You Feel So Mortal* offers a probing view of our preoccupation with the body that is both idiosyncratic and universal, leaving us with the deep satisfaction of our shared humanity.

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