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Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers

Mary Roach

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An oddly compelling, often hilarious exploration of the strange lives of our bodies postmortem. For 2,000 years, cadavers-some willingly, some unwittingly-have been involved in science's boldest strides and weirdest undertakings. They've tested France's first guillotines, ridden the NASA Space Shuttle, been crucified in a Parisian laboratory to test the authenticity of the Shroud of Turin, and helped solve the mystery of TWA Flight 800. For every new surgical procedure-from heart transplants to gender reassignment surgery-cadavers have been there alongside surgeons, making history in their quiet way. In this fascinating, ennobling account, Mary Roach visits the good deeds of cadavers over the centuries-from the anatomy labs and human-sourced pharmacies of medieval and nineteenth-century Europe to a human decay research facility in Tennessee, to a plastic surgery practice lab, to a Scandinavian funeral directors' conference on human composting. In her droll, inimitable voice, Roach tells the engrossing story of our bodies when we are no longer with them.

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