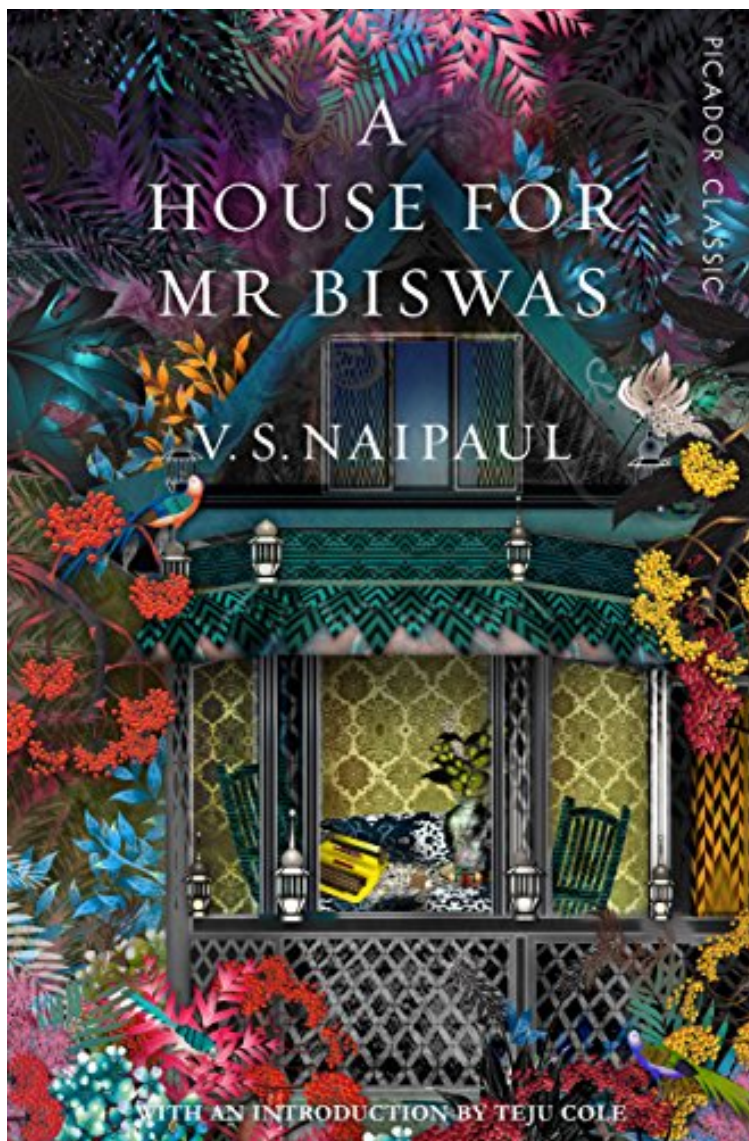


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A House For Mr Biswas: Picador Classic (English Edition)



Par V.S. Naipaul
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurWith an introduction by Teju ColeHe was struck again and again by the wonder of being in his own house, the audacity of it: to walk in through his own front gate, to bar entry to whoever he wished, to close his doors and windows every night.Mr. Biswas has been told since the day of his birth that misfortune will follow him - and so it has. Meaning only to avoid punishment, he causes the death of his father and the dissolution of his family. Wanting simply to flirt with a beautiful woman, he ends up marrying her, and reluctantly relying on her domineering family for support. But in spite of endless setbacks, Mr.

Biswas is determined to achieve independence, and so he begins his gruelling struggle to buy a home of his own. A House for Mr Biswas is Nobel Prize in Literature winner V. S. Naipaul's unforgettable masterpiece. Heart-rending and darkly comic, it has been hailed as one of the twentieth century's finest novels, a classic that evokes a man's quest for autonomy against the backdrop of post-colonial Trinidad. 'A work of great comic power qualified with firm and unsentimental compassion' Anthony Burgess 'A marvellous prose epic that matches the best nineteenth-century novels' Newsweek

Shortly before he was born there had been another quarrel between Mr Biswas's mother Bipti and his father Raghu, and Bipti had taken her three children and walked all the way in the hot sun to the village where her mother Bissoondaye lived. There Bipti had cried and told the old story of Raghu's miserliness: how he kept a check on every cent he gave her, counted every biscuit in the tin, and how he would walk ten miles rather than pay a cart a penny. Bipti's father, futile with asthma, propped himself up on his string bed and said, as he always did on unhappy occasions, 'Fate. There is nothing we can do about it.' No one paid him any attention. Fate had brought him from India to the sugar-estate, aged him quickly and left him to die in a crumbling mud hut in the swamplands; yet he spoke of Fate often and affectionately, as though, merely by surviving, he had been particularly favoured. While the old man talked on, Bissoondaye sent for the midwife, made a meal for Bipti's children and prepared beds for them. When the midwife came the children were asleep. Some time later they were awakened by the screams of Mr Biswas and the shrieks of the midwife. 'What is it?' the old man asked. 'Boy or girl?' 'Boy, boy,' the midwife cried. 'But what sort of boy? Six-fingered, and born in the wrong way.' The old man groaned and Bissoondaye said, 'I knew it. There is no luck for me.' At once, though it was night and the way was lonely, she left the hut and walked to the next village, where there was a hedge of cactus. She brought back leaves of cactus, cut them into strips and hung a strip over every door, every window, every aperture through which an evil spirit might enter the hut. But the midwife said, 'Whatever you do, this boy will eat up his own mother and father.' The next morning, when in the bright light it seemed that all evil spirits had surely left the earth, the pundit came, a small, thin man with a sharp satirical face and a dismissing manner. Bissoondaye seated him on the string bed, from which the old man had been turned out, and told him what had happened. 'Hm. Born in the wrong way. At midnight, you said.' Bissoondaye had no means of telling the time, but both she and the midwife had assumed that it was midnight, the inauspicious hour. Abruptly, as Bissoondaye sat before him with bowed and covered head, the pundit brightened, 'Oh, well. It doesn't matter. There are always ways and means of getting over these unhappy things.' He undid his red bundle and took out his astrological almanac, a sheaf of loose thick leaves, long and narrow, between boards. The leaves were brown with age and their musty smell was mixed with that of the red and ochre sandalwood paste that had been spattered on them. The pundit lifted a leaf, read a little, wet his forefinger on his tongue and lifted another leaf. At last he said, 'First of all, the features of this unfortunate boy. He will have good teeth but they will be rather wide, and there will be spaces between them. I suppose you know what that means. The boy will be a lecher and a spendthrift. Possibly a liar as well. It is hard to be sure about those gaps between the teeth. They might mean only one of those things or they might mean all three.' 'What about the six fingers, pundit?' 'That's a shocking sign, of course. The only thing I can advise is to keep him away from trees and water. Particularly water.' 'Never bath him?' 'I don't mean exactly that.' He raised his right hand, bunched the fingers and, with his head on one side, said slowly, 'One has to interpret what the book says.' He tapped the wobbly almanac with his left hand. 'And when the book says water, I think it means water in its natural form.' 'Natural form.' 'Natural form,' the pundit repeated, but uncertainly. 'I mean,' he said quickly, and with some annoyance, 'keep him away from rivers and ponds. And of course the sea. And another thing,' He added with satisfaction. 'He will have an unlucky sneeze.' He began to pack the long leaves of his almanac. 'Much of the evil this boy will undoubtedly bring will be mitigated if his father is forbidden to see him for twenty-one days.' 'That will be easy,' Bissoondaye said, speaking with emotion for the first time. 'On the twenty-first day the father must see the boy. But not in the flesh.' 'In a mirror, pundit?' 'I would consider that ill-advised. Use a brass plate. Scour it well.' 'Of course.' 'You must fill this brass plate with coconut oil--which, by the way, you must make yourself from coconuts you have collected with your own hands--and in the reflection on this oil the father must see his son's face.' He tied the almanac together and rolled it in the red cotton wrapper which was also spattered with sandalwood paste. 'I believe that is all.' 'We forgot one thing, punditji. The name.' 'I can't help you completely there. But it seems to me that a perfectly safe prefix would be Mo. It is up to you to think of something to add to that.' 'Oh, punditji, you must help me. I can only think of hun.' The pundit was surprised and genuinely pleased. 'But that is excellent. Excellent. Mohun. I couldn't have chosen better myself. For Mohun, as you know, means the beloved, and

was the name given by the milkmaids to Lord Krishna.' His eyes softened at the thought of the legend and for a moment he appeared to forget Bissoondaye and Mr Biswas. From the knot at the end of her veil Bissoondaye took out a florin and offered it to the pundit, mumbling her regret that she could not give more.

The pundit said that she had done her best and was not to worry. In fact he was pleased; he had expected less. Mr Biswas lost his sixth finger before he was nine days old. It simply came off one night and Bipti had an unpleasant turn when, shaking out the sheets one morning, she saw this tiny finger tumble to the ground. Bissoondaye thought this an excellent sign and buried the finger behind the cowpen at the back of the house, not far from where she had buried Mr Biswas's navel-string. In the days that followed Mr Biswas was treated with attention and respect. His brothers and sisters were slapped if they disturbed his sleep, and the flexibility of his limbs was regarded as a matter of importance. Morning and evening he was massaged with coconut oil. All his joints were exercised; his arms and legs were folded diagonally across his red shining body; the big toe of his right foot was made to touch his left shoulder, the big toe of his left foot was made to touch his right shoulder, and both toes were made to touch his nose; finally, all his limbs were bunched together over his belly and then, with a clap and a laugh, released. Mr Biswas responded well to these exercises, and Bissoondaye became so confident that she decided to have a celebration on the ninth day. She invited people from the village and fed them. The pundit came and was unexpectedly gracious, though his manner suggested that but for his intervention there would have been no celebration at all. Jhagru, the barber, brought his drum, and Selochan did the Shiva dance in the cowpen, his body smeared all over with ash. There was an unpleasant moment when Raghu, Mr Biswas's father, appeared. He had walked; his dhoti and jacket were sweated and dusty. 'Well, this is very nice,' he said. 'Celebrating. And where is the father?' 'Leave this house at once,' Bissoondaye said, coming out of the kitchen at the side. 'Father! What sort of father do you call yourself, when you drive your wife away every time she gets heavy-footed?' 'That is none of your business,' Raghu said. 'Where is my son?' 'Go ahead. God has paid you back for your boasting and your meanness. Go and see your son. He will eat you up. Six-fingered, born in the wrong way. Go in and see him. He has an unlucky sneeze as well.' Raghu halted. 'Unlucky sneeze?' 'I have warned you. You can only see him on the twenty-first day. If you do anything stupid now the responsibility will be yours.' From his string bed the old man muttered abuse at Raghu. 'Shameless, wicked. When I see the behaviour of this man I begin to feel that the Black Age has come.' The subsequent quarrel and threats cleared the air. Raghu confessed he had been in the wrong and had already suffered much for it. Bipti said she was willing to go back to him. And he agreed to come again on the twenty-first day. To prepare for that day Bissoondaye began collecting dry coconuts. She husked them, grated the kernels and set about extracting the oil the pundit had prescribed. It was a long job of boiling and skimming and boiling again, and it was surprising how many coconuts it took to make a little oil. But the oil was ready in time, and Raghu came, neatly dressed, his hair plastered flat and shining, his moustache trimmed, and he was very correct as he took off his hat and went into the dark inner room of the hut which smelled warmly of oil and old thatch. He held his hat on the right side of his face and looked down into the oil in the brass plate. Mr Biswas, hidden from his father by the hat, and well wrapped from head to foot, was held face downwards over the oil. He didn't like it; he furrowed his forehead, shut his eyes tight and bawled. The oil rippled, clear amber, broke up the reflection of Mr Biswas's face, already distorted with rage, and the viewing was over. A few days later Bipti and her children returned home. And there Mr Biswas's importance steadily diminished. The time came when even the daily massage ceased. But he still carried weight. They never forgot that he was an unlucky child and that his sneeze was particularly unlucky. Mr Biswas caught cold easily and in the rainy season threatened his family with destitution. If, before Raghu left for the sugar-estate, Mr Biswas sneezed, Raghu remained at home, worked on his vegetable garden in the morning and spent the afternoon making walking-sticks and sabots, or carving des...
Revue de presse
A marvelous prose epic that matches the best nineteenth-century novels for richness of comic insight, and final, tragic power. -- Newsweek