

★ **Adults and Other Children****Miriam Cohen**

Ig Publishing (Jan 14, 2020)

Softcover \$16.95 (200pp)

978-1-63246-099-8

Lies, misconceptions and self-deception are at the heart of Miriam Cohen's funny, scathing, and touching collection *Adults and Other Children*. Following the fortunes of girls as they navigate the perilous road to adulthood, Cohen's interconnected stories grapple with the preoccupations of modern middle-class life—fidelity, careers, starting a family—and how it's all too easy to fool yourself and others.

From the opening story, "Naughty," in which the lead character spins a web of imaginary monsters and nannies to mask her mother's affair with the next-door neighbor, Cohen's tales are coated with unease as innocence collides with reality. Decay and death are never far. Individual stories tackle bulimia, rare diseases, and rumored serial killers. When the heroines aren't coping with loser boyfriends and lecherous bosses, they're dealing with the fallout from their own messed-up families, wherein the adults are just as clueless as the kids.

Some of the stories lean sardonic. In "Expecting," a teacher covers up her alcoholism by pretending to be pregnant, resulting in a comic series of misunderstandings and misplaced sympathies. In "Odd Goods," a professor contends with condescension and subtle harassment before she turns the tables on her oppressor with an outright lie. Other entries in the collection are more delicate and poignant, such as "Old for Your Age, Tall for Your Height," in which schoolchildren are forced to spend playtime with a developmentally disabled classmate, leading to a bittersweet epiphany about growing up.

The second half of the book focuses on three women as they confront their ticking biological clocks, but even as the freewheeling days of youth give way to the melancholic realities of adulthood, Cohen maintains her fleet style, her stories peppered with wry observations and off-center, ribald humor. Sometimes raw and always entertaining, her collection is a pleasure.

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