



★ Lesser Known Monsters of the 21st Century

Kim Fu

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The incredible merges with the everyday in Kim Fu's short story collection *Lesser Known Monsters of the 21st Century*.

Puberty takes a fantastical turn for a group of teenage girls. Neighborhood children obsess over the accidental deaths of a family no one liked. Everyone on Earth loses their sense of taste, causing a strange rift between a mother and daughter. Each story takes a common issue—mental illness, unhealthy relationships, the shunning of those who are different—and turns it into an extraordinary ordeal from which each person emerges forever altered.

The collection opens with “Pre-Simulation Consultation XF007867,” a gut-punch about a person who longs to see their dead mother one last time through a reality simulator, the moral implications of which are not well understood. It then moves through gripping, sometimes disturbing tales about characters whose lives are changed—usually for the worse—by bizarre incidents.

Some of the stories speculate about how future advancements could impact evergreen, even mundane problems. “Twenty Hours” is about a husband who, thanks to the misuse of a new invention, can murder and resurrect his wife whenever he needs a break from her. It is at once horrifying and more poignant than expected.

Other stories are eerie fantasies that cast familiar feelings and struggles in a new light. “Liddy, First to Fly” follows a young teenager who sprouts wings on her legs, bringing her closer to friends from whom she was growing apart. “June Bugs,” by contrast, is one of the collection's more grounded stories, about a woman who escapes her abusive boyfriend and moves into a house infested with out-of-season insects. Whether outlandish or just odd, each story is a quiet, unforgettable revolution.

Lesser Known Monsters of the 21st Century is a breathtaking collection of speculative fiction stories about how new places and innovations affect timeless emotions.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (January / February 2022)

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