

The First Prehistoric Serial Killer and Other Stories

Teresa Solana

Peter Bush, Translator

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Teresa Solana's short story collection *The First Prehistoric Serial Killer* is darkly amusing and always entertaining. Its depictions of various criminal schemes and instances of murder range from realistic to fantastical.

All of the stories take place in Spain, which is made familiar thanks to strong descriptions and narrative voices. The book's succinct yet evocative descriptions of people, places, and things are indispensable.

While each story is centered around criminal activities, no two feel the same. Characters are distinct and, though they are often murderers, rather likable. The matter-of-fact way that Fefe, the narrator of "Still Life No. 41," explains accidentally labeling a dead body as part of an art exhibit is entertaining, but the play-by-play she gives of the audience enjoying the "sculpture" is disturbingly hilarious. The unconventional protagonists are the most amusing. From the Neanderthal detective in "The First Prehistoric Serial Killer" to the family of ghosts in "Happy Families," these absurdist characters feel genuine.

"I Am a Vampire" centers around a rehabilitated vampire who wants to help clean the town he lives in of other vampires. His thoughts on modern life and on old-fashioned vampire cliché are outrageously funny when paired with his subtle, low-key narrative voice.

In the second half of the collection, "Connections," all of the stories are connected. Through each brief encounter, more and more of the setting comes together; by the end, there is a clear and distinct picture of a specific neighborhood in Barcelona. Wry humor comes through simple, offhand descriptions.

Although the characters' voices are all unique, their names blur together, especially if the stories are read through too close together. Individual stories are brief and could probably be longer; they end just shy of satisfaction.

The First Prehistoric Serial Killer is packed with unconventional characters who are funny enough to lighten the tone around multiple horrifically violent deaths.

SHANA CREANEY (September/October 2018)

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