



F*cking Argentina and 10 More Tales of Exasperation

Gregg Greenberg

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*In the humorous stories of F*cking Argentina and 10 More Tales of Exasperation, little, and big, points of annoyance direct the action.*

Life has a way of getting in the way in Gregg Greenberg's short story collection *F*cking Argentina and 10 More Tales of Exasperation*.

Beginning with a definition of exasperation and ending with Covid-19 references, these eleven tales showcase the little annoyances and irritations of everyday life. Friends, loved ones, neighbors, and strangers interact in ways that make great anecdotes for later retellings, though, in the moment, their situations are overwhelming.

The reigning strain of the characters' emotional lives results in a cohesive collection that is funny as often as it is tiring. In the funny entry "The Last Couples Dinner," Jodi has been putting off inviting her best friend and her husband over for dinner because the friend's husband is a one-upper of the extreme variety, and Jodi doesn't want to ruin her friendship. When she runs out of excuses not to invite them over, her husband makes it his mission to amuse her by one-upping the other husband's one-upsmanship. Jodi's recognition of her foibles results in a clear narrative flow.

"Little Timmy's Birthday Battle" is written in the form of SMS text messages between a couple; each tries to get the other to finagle their son an invitation to a Zoom party. In "Back Off Baxter!" a father tries to communicate to a neighbor that his daughter is afraid of dogs, but the neighbor only gets it when the child in question tells her to "get your f*cking dog out of my face."

From their benign annoyance of enduring school procedures in "Weinberger's Back-to-School Night" to their confused irritation in "It's Not You, It's BFJ," each main character is exasperated in some way. With few exceptions, they come across as misanthropes; the exceptions to that rule are the book's standouts. The objects of characters' exasperation originate outside of themselves; often, characters exacerbate their irritation by focusing on those objects. But because they are only allowed one emotional note, the characters run together.

The book's humor does not alleviate the fact that its "tales of exasperation" leave little room for other emotions and interpretations. Though it is foul more often than not, the book's language is straightforward and uncomplicated. Action reigns; settings are mostly foregone, with the exceptions of minor mentions that fill in some blanks (opposite side of the street parking; sidewalks just large enough for a couple to walk down together). Most can be imagined to take place in any large city.

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DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH (January 5, 2021)

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