



Julian in Purgatory

Jon Allen

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Julian in Purgatory portrays drug addiction in a breezy, entertaining style.

Julian is living with his girlfriend, Dana. Instead of looking for a job, he spends his days in the thrall of pills. When Dana kicks him out, he visits friends, Dana's brother, and his father, begging, lying, and resorting to burglary to get his next fix. The theft comes back to haunt Julian, leading to an exciting final act that puts his survival in doubt.

Affecting dialogue finds Julian dissembling and spouting excuses: the pills are for his back and his anxiety; he'll have money later in the week. When Dana flushes his drugs down the toilet, he says, "Don't you realize that's going to get into the water supply??" Julian wields guilt as a weapon, and scenes of Dana grappling with the aftermath of her decisions are as compelling as Julian's own struggles.

Julian and the rest of the cast are anthropomorphic animals. Jon Allen's cartoon art is amusing even as it depicts Julian's descent. He imagines a television game show host telling him to hide his stolen stash of drugs; another character experiments with pills. These episodes provide comic relief and are authentic: everything's funny, until it suddenly isn't. As the book ends, the consequences of Julian's actions loom.

Substantial yet easy to read, this book demands to be finished in one sitting. Its characters are well drawn, in both the literary sense and in the more obvious artistic one. *Julian in Purgatory* is an unforgettable cautionary tale.

PETER DABBENE (January / February 2021)

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