



Invisible Differences

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In *Invisible Differences*, a young woman struggles with Asperger's syndrome, but also triumphs.

Asperger's syndrome—an often misunderstood, high-functioning form of autism—is marked by social awkwardness and a tendency toward intense, specific interests. Julie Dachez bases her graphic text on her own experiences; in it, Marguerite is her fictional stand-in.

Marguerite tries to make sense of the noise, social interactions, and unpredictable nature of her daily life. She copes through routines and rituals, including regular stops at a bakery and a bookstore. But her social miscues jeopardize her employment, and her aversion to gatherings puts a strain on her relationship with her boyfriend, Florian.

It's astounding to learn that France's understanding and treatment of Asperger's is well behind that of other industrialized countries, but makes Marguerite's moments of success soar that much higher. She finds liberation in an official diagnosis and learns how to be a happy, productive person while spreading awareness of Asperger's syndrome.

The book's art is vital, expressive, stylish, and appealing, an equal partner with its script. The strong visual storytelling is perhaps best showcased after Marguerite shares her diagnosis with Florian: they both sit on the floor, facing the reader; she rests, at peace, eyes closed, as he sits open-eyed, stunned, and frightened for their future.

Though most of the story is delivered through dialogue or images, occasional captions add crucial information, as with "When she talks, Marguerite sounds like a book. A 19th-century book." Bonus sections include a history of autism, facts about Asperger's syndrome, tips on managing Asperger's, and a list of further resources. *Invisible Differences* is an honest, enlightening, and inspirational graphic treatment of a serious subject.

PETER DABBENE (September / October 2020)

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