



★ Living with Viola

Rosena Fung

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Living with Viola is the heartwrenching but triumphant story of a girl grappling with anxiety and cultural differences.

Livy is a Canadian middle school student of Chinese descent. She's attending a new school, and feels alone. After being assigned to a group project, she makes three friends, but she is conscious of every way in which she's different from them: her parents are "very Chinese" and don't have impressive jobs, like her friend Charlotte's parents; Livy isn't athletic like Beth, or cool like Maddy. There's pressure from her own family to do better in school, too.

Underlying it all is the presence of Livy's dark, anxious side, represented as "Viola," a lookalike whom only she can see, who whispers "They're judging you" and "No one likes you," shattering Livy's confidence. Pushed to her limit, Livy tells her mom about her feelings. Meetings with a doctor teach her coping techniques to keep Viola in her place.

Livy is lovable, and when she summons the courage to seek help, it's an emotional moment, as is the final revelation of her art project. The book's artwork is excellent, and the text works in flawless partnership with it to convey actions, emotions, and moods. The lettering also warrants praise: varied letter sizes capture the highs and lows of Livy's experiences.

The book handles a sensitive topic in a gentle but realistic way, proffering important insights about a silent, often difficult to detect mental health issue. *Living with Viola* is an outstanding graphic novel.

PETER DABBENE (January / February 2022)

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