★ Brittle Joints

Maria Sweeney
Street Noise Books (Jun 25, 2024)
Softcover $20.99 (160pp)
978-1-951491-26-0

Maria Sweeney documents her life with a rare disability in her graphic memoir *Brittle Joints*.

From childhood onward, Sweeney lived with pain and uncertainty related to her diagnosis with Bruck syndrome, a progressive condition that weakens the bones and joints. It led to surgeries until her body was full of titanium supports. She felt the frustrations of navigating the health care system too. Everyday tasks required extra time and planning, and all was shadowed by the looming specter of a potential fall and more broken bones. Still, she survived, flourishing with the help of her friends, art, romance, and medical marijuana.

Broken into vignettes that have a cumulative effect, this is a powerful book. A childhood fall on the playground, from which Sweeney was rescued by a man with an arm disability who assured her that he was okay, even as she realized that she was staring at him in the same way that other people stared at her, is followed up with other scenes covering the emotional impact of unsolicited advice, comments, and offers of help from strangers. And the book delights in pleasures, as of puffing marijuana rolled in rose petals and licking honeysuckle nectar. The illustrations are beautiful and revealing too, conveying Sweeney's pride and dignity throughout.

Brittle Joints is an intimate graphic memoir about living through everyday pain and inconveniences with verve.

PETER DABBENE (July / August 2024)