



## Turning Japanese

*MariNaomi*

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**Turning Japanese** MariNaomi

**MariNaomi's newest graphic novel tours the mid-90's US and Japanese illegal hostess bar scene and her own personal cultural awakening.**

In 1995, twenty-two-year-old Mari had just exited a long-term relationship, moving from Mill Valley to San Jose, California. Soon enough, she falls in love, then finds employment at a hostess bar for Japanese expats, where she is determined to learn the Japanese language and culture. *Turning Japanese* is a story about otherness, culture clashes, generation gaps, and youthful impetuosity.

## Turning Japanese Details

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Author : MariNaomi

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## From Reader Review Turning Japanese for online ebook

### Kim says

The great thing about Turning Japanese is that Mari Naomi does not romanticize or demonize the Japanese/East Asian culture, which happens very rarely (unfortunately) in Western arts & culture. It does not mean that she only talks about easy topics. It is rather the opposite: she worked at the hostess bar! As a guilt-driven Eastern Asian myself, it is incredible to see someone who is not afraid to try anything she wants. Her architecture drawings are incredible.

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### Bryan says

An excellent read!

I ordered this immediately after completing "Kiss & Tell" as I very much enjoyed that graphic memoir. Also, in-between I'd listened to an interview she done on a podcast discussing this book which made me anticipate my reading before the book arrived.

Well, my excitement to read was pleasantly rewarded. Mari does such a wonderful job laying out her story with regards to pacing. She also is very good at comedic timing and weaving in the dramatic moments. There is several times I found myself chuckling out-loud and rereading that page and laughing again at the same thing, but then shortly after would feel my eyes swell up at a dramatic moment. Which by the way, there is a portion of this book where tears were flowing. This happened because she set her self up in the beginning of her book for me (the reader) to care about her from reading that point forward. Also, I feel it helped I had previously read "Kiss & Tell" so I was already empathetic towards her.

I had mentioned comedic moments above. So far, for me at least, she is the best at "profiles" for characters/scenarios. Reminds me a lot of what Wes Anderson does in his films. I personally LOVE these and have not came across anyone else who does this in the graphic novel format.

I also had mentioned this in my review of "Kiss & Tell", but I'd like to say again how much I admire her bravery for sharing such personal memories and life events with the reader. There are many times when I was reading that I just sighed "wow" to myself. This sort of inspired me to share some very private things with some friends at a gathering this weekend. I definitely would not have had the courage to have done that if it wasn't for reading these 2 books so much that I now consider her to be a hero of mine.

Thank you MariNaomi!

I've ordered Dragon's Breath and will be very excited to read that when it arrives.

Other thoughts

I loved the design/shape of this book. The size was perfect as I was able to sit/lay in any position while reading the book and be comfy.

She has her podcast "Ask Bi Grlz", which is nice as each episode has certain topics they discuss/cover. I've

listened to a couple and I believe this made my personal read more entertaining because I could "hear" her voice while reading which wasn't the case for "Kiss & Tell".

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### **ararab says**

3.5  
good  
read in 2hours  
lots o boobies

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### **Hanna-Pirita Lehkonen says**

This was seriously so inspiring. After reading this book I just wanted to make my own autobio comics! Inspiring books are my favorites. If a book can make you feel inspired to create, it's 5/5!

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### **Robert says**

Mari's third graphic novel memoir to date is a series of vignettes exploring her Japanese roots and cultural identity (she's mixed race). It's a beautiful, insightful and rich piece of work, and guess what, I love it—I actually made myself read it slowly over the weekend to make it last longer. Five stars, and def get this.

Update: I interviewed Mari for The Comics Journal and it went up 6/30/16: <http://bit.ly/295ca8a>

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### **Jon(athan) Nakapalau says**

Just finished this book and it was great! I go to Japantown in San Jose almost every week and I had no Idea what was going on behind closed doors! MariNaomi deals with the challenge of working in a hostess bar for Japanese expats while trying to learn Japanese. Her keen cultural observations are both funny and reveling at the same time. Her trip to Japan and her attempt to "use" the Japanese she learned is a classic example of how much cultural nuance and language are connected. Read this book if you are planning on taking a trip to Japan...you will be glad you did!

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### **David Schaafsma says**

I love the title of this book, which also reminded me to read David Mura's book by the exact same name. I love the square size of it, the color and design of it. I have read three books by MariNaomi now and have liked them all. Kiss and Tell, her first, is the really fun story of every single sexual experience she has had in her life up to the age of 22. It's not offensive at all; rather, MariNaomi's charming and startling personality come through clearly.

Dragon's Breath is the other book I read, also memoir comics, and in it you can see a leap in artistic quality, maybe something you should expect from someone approaching her late thirties, having been in the comics game for a long time. I saw MariNaomi at the recent alt-comics convention here in Chicago, CAKE, smiling whenever I saw her; she was one of the older artists there, a kind of sensei of memoir comics for the younger artists there.

Turning Japanese has an interesting and intriguing topic. About forty, she decides to write about a time in her early twenties when she made a decision to explore her Japanese heritage. She's a "hafu," half Japanese, and had not been raised to speak the language or know that much about Japan. This was true for me as a Dutch-American, discouraged from being Dutch by my assimilating parents, so I had some empathy for her looking-back-at-decades-ago project. To "turn Japanese" she decides to first work in a hostess bar for Japanese expats in the US, where she intends to learn the Japanese language and culture. This leads her to go with her cabdriver boyfriend to live and work for a time in Tokyo, where she also does hostess work (which is like being assigned to a table to help a group have a bit more fun; it's not sex work).

The art in Turning Japanese is terrific, a master's project of design, and her personality comes through, her humor, her honesty. We get to know her mother, her boyfriend, her grandmother, a few co-workers, and a few customers through her amused lens. We don't really find anything that interesting about hostess work, though. Some odd customers and co-workers, I guess. And Tokyo seems pretty cool. It's basically a travelogue, Americans surfing the culture. Wow! This cool toy store! Wow, this array of fresh veggie foods available to us!

MN somewhat amusingly can't learn Japanese very well at all there--she uses squiggles to represent so much of what confuses her when Japanese locals talk with her. So in spite of her wanting to "turn Japanese," the story seems to me like any traveling cultural clash. There's not that much memorable in the details, but the overall effect is pleasant and fun and inviting. The thing I recall days later about the book is MariNaomi, and that's a good thing.

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### **Sarah Lashinsky says**

Open-hearted, sweet, and frank, Turning Japanese was a true joy to read. MariNaomi's attention to detail made this book feel intimate and relatable. For example, I loved noticing Mari's roots growing in, just one of the tiny subtleties the author included that breathed life into the characters.

On more than one occasion, I found myself laughing aloud at the lighthearted situations Mari and her partner found themselves in (wish I could give a sixth star just for incense toes!). I look forward to everything MariNaomi makes next!

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### **CaseyTheCanadianLesbrarian says**

I liked this better than her other book that I've read, *Kiss and Tell*, but I still felt similarly that some kind of emotional significance or impact was missing. It might also be something about narrative that is not quite there; less so than *Kiss and Tell*, but *Turning Japanese* is more a series of moments rather than a seamless story whose parts are linked. But they're not really episodes either. Sometimes I read a page and thought: why is this included? How does this relate to the rest of the story? Because it's not remarkable on its own. Or

maybe there was something lacking in characterization? I never really felt like I understood who her boyfriend Giuseppe was or why she liked him. Hmm, I can't quite put my finger on what didn't totally do it for me.

That said, I love her drawings. There were also some powerful parts of her trying to connect with a culture that was never passed down to her and frustration of trying to learn a language so different from what she grew up speaking. I imagine the parts about being mixed race and neither one or the other will resonate with lots of readers, especially ones who have mixed backgrounds themselves. I found it moving and fascinating when the memoir addressed those things directly. A few parts were quite funny too! Sometimes moving/painful and funny at the same time. Like here:

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### **Emily says**

Hi Mari. I feel weird writing a review of your book because I know you are going to read it, but I enjoyed it very much.

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### **Oriana says**

Nice, minimalist art, and sweet, meandering story. Another reader called it a "book of moments," and that's how I remember it also: MariNaomi working as a hostess at a club for Asian businessmen, MariNaomi and her boyfriend shopping at cute stores in Tokyo, MariNaomi fighting with her rural grandparents and then sneaking out for a smoke and a walk.

We did some thematic food at club: matcha Kit-Kats, red bean cake, and a huge bowl of seaweed salad:

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### **MariNaomi says**

Hello, I hope you like my book! Also, you are pretty.

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### **Elizabeth (Miss Eliza) says**

This book is divided in two, Mari living in San Jose with her boyfriend and working at an illegal hostess bar, and Mari and her boyfriend's sojourn in Japan for three months, where she also worked at a hostess bar. The first half in San Jose dragged and was kind of weird, the second half was great, with the traveling and seeing her family. While the first half was needed, a good editor would have had her shore it up. Also the

drawing style is very inconsistent, from stick figures to detailed drawings of shrines I felt that a middle ground should have been used consistently.

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### **Maria says**

An engrossing graphic memoir about the author's visit to Japan with her boyfriend as she tries to find herself in Japan as well as in her own Asian-American culture.

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### **Chris says**

Mari Naomi has risen to the top of a populous and diverse group of comic artists contributing to the rise of autobiographical comics. Her work is very honest, appearing to leave no corner of her life unexamined. Her skillful storytelling allows a glimpse into her life while causing you to reflect on your own past. Ever since my first encounter with her work I've continued to come back for more and she has delivered. It is a credit to how she has lived her life that in volume after volume we never tread the same ground as a reader. Whether we are asked to explore the themes of childhood, race, gender, sexuality or combinations of the same we see it all through the complex and delicate lens of her unflinching eye. By the end of these stories she may own your heart or break it but you will know what it is to live a full and beautiful life even as you are encouraged to examine your own.

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