

## Dragon's Breath and Other True Tales

**MariNaomi**

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*MariNaomi cuts to the quick with her emotionally resonant comics collection that offers variety and a comforting voice.*

A practiced hand at personal, tell-all comics, MariNaomi collects comics from her ongoing online feature *Smoke in Your Eyes* (theRumpus.net) with a few additional comics in *Dragon's Breath and Other True Stories*. These comics are perhaps even stronger when seen in print instead of on a computer screen, as one can better appreciate her work without the distractions of comments and banner ads, and having to click and scroll.

MariNaomi's tales are a perfect blend of visual and narrative drive, with neither aspect overpowering the other. Even so, the kinds of personal reflections featured in *Dragon's Breath* can grow tiresome as delivered by some authors—a problem MariNaomi avoids not just through the quality of her stories (none of them feel like “filler” meant to expand a few strong stories into a full book-length collection) but also by keeping the reader off-balance.

A short, emotional meditation on friendship, “Whole,” shows two women comforting each other in separate times of need, their inner emotional states represented by black spots, or holes, on their torsos. This heavy piece is followed by a fun romp as the author and her friends find themselves at a party with their girlhood idols: the members of Duran Duran (“Heartthrobs”). The arrangement of stories has a rhythm that is recognizable, but surprising, like a song written in an unusual time signature.

Although there are classic comic-book style panels in some stories, MariNaomi is innovative with her layouts and design, as well, changing her style based on the topic. She is unafraid to incorporate novel elements for emotional effect, like the newspaper clipping that follows the brief tale of an acquaintance who committed suicide (“Inner Beauty”). Her art is simple and straightforward, but she varies fonts and the ratio of text to illustrations from one story to the next, keeping everything fresh and leaving the reader to wonder what might be coming next.

Most importantly, this dazzling display of various techniques is effective, as well as affecting—hers is a voice comfortable enough to be honest about the faults of others, and herself. Tales of childhood and adolescence, failed and successful romances, interactions with bedbugs and strange people, all combine to make *Dragon's Breath and Other True Stories* an enjoyable and introspective read.

PETER DABBENE (Winter 2015)

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