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'My Broken Mariko' Manga Is An Emotional Journey Of Love And Loss



Lauren Orsini Senior Contributor

[Games](#)

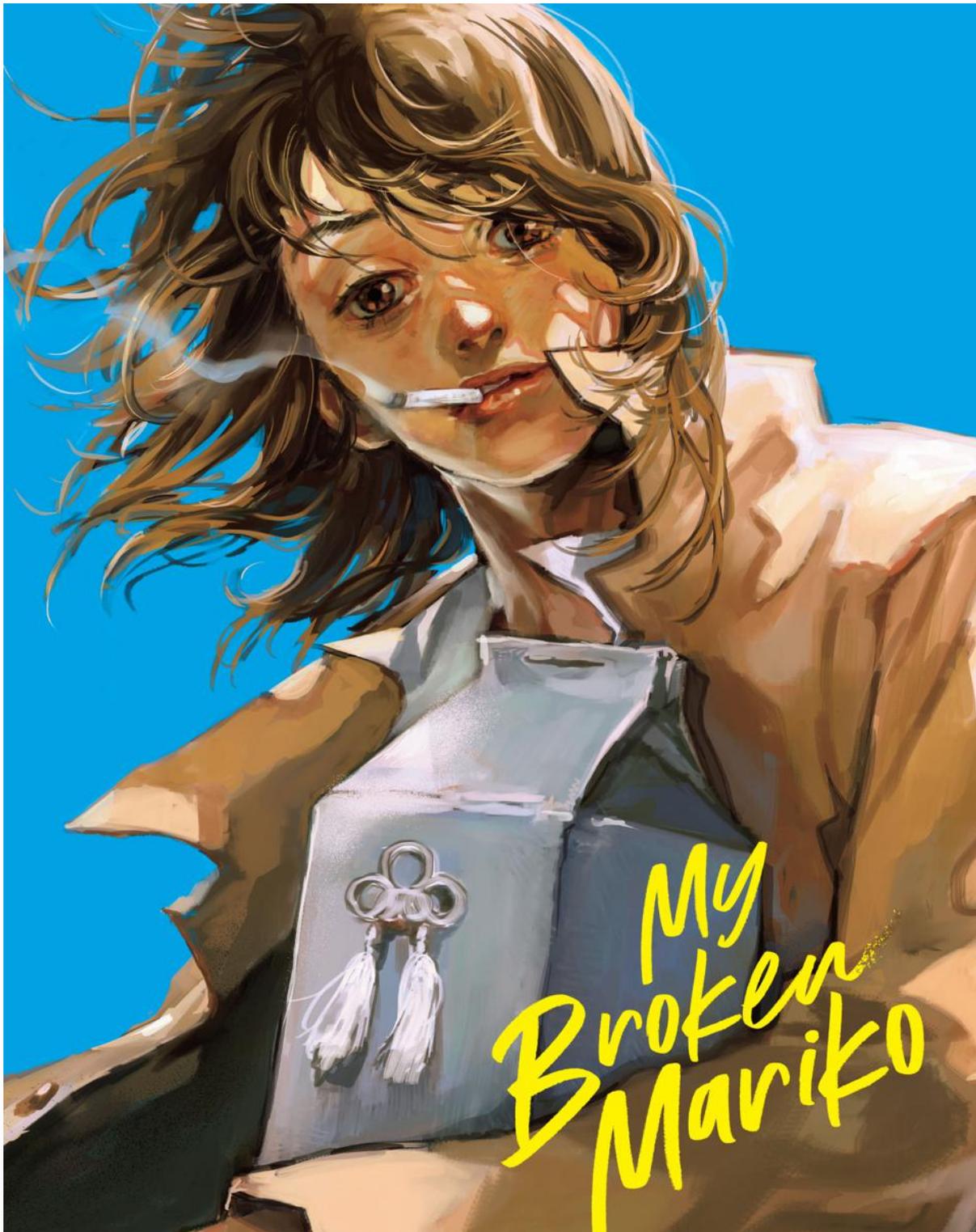
I write about the business of fandom.



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MY BROKEN MARIKO ©WAKA HIRAKO 2020 / KADOKAWA CORPORATION

Tomoyo Shiino is a young office worker with a short fuse. When she learns that her best friend has committed suicide, she takes an unconventional approach to her grief by “liberating” Mariko’s ashes from her deadbeat dad and taking them on one last road trip.

That’s the premise of *My Broken Mariko*, a queercoded story of love, loss, and mental health. Tomoyo has supported Mariko through years of abuse, neglect, and depression, but was never quite able to chase away her friend’s demons for her. Now, with only Mariko’s ashes for company, Tomoyo reflects on the deepest and closest relationship of her life. As she undertakes a reckless, self-destructive quest in the name of putting her friend at peace, the intensity of her emotions toward Mariko threaten to overwhelm her—and the reader, too.

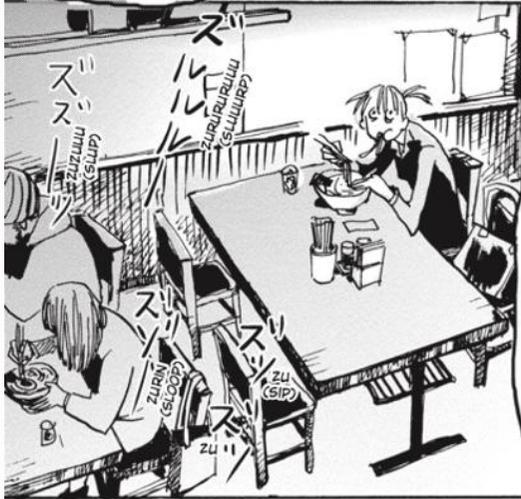
Expressive artwork and an evocative narrative reach an emotional crescendo in Waka Hirako’s startling debut. Hirako excels at detailed and powerful facial expressions, which range from elation to fury to abject misery as the characters’ emotions threaten to burst off of the page. Though Mariko is dead before the first page of the story, Tomoyo’s vivid memories underline the tragedy of her life in an elegy so convincing, the reader is moved to mourn with her. It’s a brief, intense read with a cathartic finish.

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...after she fell from her fourth-floor apartment balcony.

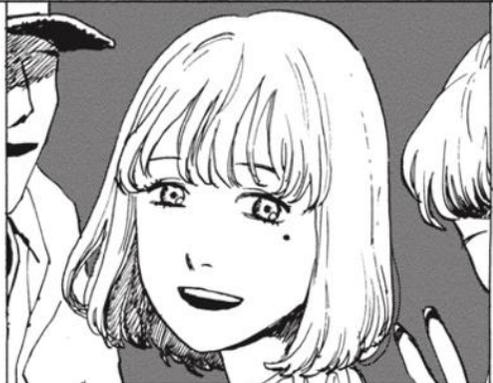


In the early hours of the twenty-eighth, the body of a twenty-six-year-old woman from Nakano Ward, Tokyo...
...was found by her neighbors...



The deceased had swallowed a large quantity of sleeping pills...

...WAS MY BEST FRIEND.



MARIKO IKAGAWA, THE WOMAN WHO DIED THAT DAY...



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My Broken Mariko will be out in English from [Yen Press on November 10](#) as a single volume manga. I received a digital copy from Yen Press so I could interview Hirako before the manga's English release. I asked Hirako about her real-life experiences that led to the manga, her message for readers struggling with depression, and whether Tomoyo and Mariko could have been more than friends. Note that the final question of the interview, which begins with “at the end of the story,” could be construed as a spoiler. Read on to see the author's answers, as translated by [Jenny McKeon](#).

Lauren Orsini: *Was there a real-life experience that inspired the events of this manga?*

Waka Hirako: I think the most fundamental inspiration came from my mother, who is a survivor of abuse. She sometimes told me about her experiences with the physical and emotional abuse she was subjected to by both of her parents. Her experience with abuse had an immeasurably large effect on her entire life; as I was

caught up in the storm that she carried within her, I witnessed the resulting rough patches, turmoil, and hardships up close while she raised me.

Throughout my life, I wondered how I could ever dispel the outrage, sadness, and helplessness I often felt when my mother told me about her experiences. “If only I could have been her mother instead...” “I wish I could’ve at least been her friend when she was a kid...” “Why can’t I do anything about her past?” “Who should I direct my hatred toward about this, and how?” And so, I ended up having the protagonist of this story act out just a few of those thoughts and feelings in my place.

In addition, when I started drawing this story, there were reports on the news every day about an incident in Japan in which a six-year-old girl died due to her mother’s abuse. Such heartbreaking incidents still occur everywhere to this day, and there are countless victims whose stories are never reported at all. I never knew what to do when I learned such painful facts, so I hoped that perhaps I could begin to confront that situation in the form of this manga, or at least continue to think about it.

Orsini: *Out of Shiino and Mariko, which of the two do you relate to more and why?*

Hirako: There are aspects of Mariko that I relate to as well, but I think I have a bigger connection to Shiino, since I too have the strong feeling of wishing I could’ve helped someone important to me when they were a victim of violence.

Orsini: *When Mariko begs Shiino not to get a boyfriend, it feels almost romantic. In another situation, could Shiino and Mariko have been more than friends?*

Hirako: If one of them had wished for that kind of relationship, I suspect the other would have agreed to it. Feelings of friendship and romantic love are seamlessly connected, and can even fluctuate, so I wouldn’t say it’s impossible. They might also

have wanted to become family, rather than lovers, so overall if they had more options for their relationship, I do think things might have ended differently.

Orsini: *What would you want readers struggling with depression to take away from the story?*

Hirako: The suffering you're going through is absolutely not your fault alone. There may be burdens you've been forced to bear or blows you've been dealt without even noticing, whether that's due to society or other individuals who have warped your perception of reality. I'm sure some of those burdens are things that you can let go of. There's no need to panic or rush; we have every right to take as long as we need to process and grieve. And we also have the right to let things go, and to forget. There may be things you don't want to forget, of course, but perhaps you can put them aside for now, and confront them when you've recovered enough energy to do so? It's hard to explain. I myself struggled with depression for a long time and found it incredibly difficult to treat myself with kindness. Please, don't make things harder on yourself with thoughts like "it's my own fault for being sad" and "I should just be happy."

Orsini: *At the end of the story, Shiino receives a note from Mariko, but the reader doesn't get to see it. Why did you decide to leave this note up to the reader's imagination?*

Hirako: If I showed the answer at the end, the reader might feel relieved and stop thinking about things. The satisfaction of having the mystery solved might make people forget about the rest. I thought that not showing the answer might be necessary to console Mariko, while also prompting the reader to keep thinking about the story.

It's my hope that we can all continue to think about and search for the answers together, for the sake of helping people like Mariko, and solving the other injustices in the world.



Lauren Orsini

I'm a professional journalist and avid student of fan culture. My reporting has appeared on CNN, PBS, the Daily Dot, and numerous other outlets. My blog, Otaku... **Read More**

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