



DRAMA QUEENS

a novel

Vickie Gendreau

Translated by Aimee Wall

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Book*hug Press acknowledges that the land on which we operate is the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples. We recognize the enduring presence of many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples and are grateful for the opportunity to meet and work on this territory.

Warning. Any resemblance to real persons is intentional. Every cliché evoked has actually been lived. You are condemned to remember in this book. You can always put it down. It's not too late. It's never too late to put down a book. Or to fold the newspaper back up and turn off the TV. Or to stop eating. Or to shut everyone out. Or to cling to the past. Your hands. You decide. You're the hero.

Warning. If I'm forced to change your name, I'm going to shit all over your entire childhood, call you Stanislas instead of Samuel, and shit all over your entire childhood. Make you pick it all up every night with a shovel, and nobody to hold the bag.

Warning. If you're in my life, there's a chance you'll find yourself in my book. If I pass you on the street, there's a chance you'll find yourself in my book. I take photos of everything; I write poems. If I find your outfit disappoint-

ing, I'll put you in something purple. So that you match the book, at least. If I find your job disappointing, I'll find you a better one. If I find your life disappointing, I'll invent another one for you, a more exciting one. What's actually truly interesting are the moments of solitude. Since I'm not there when you're alone, I'll have to imagine them.

ANNA KETAMINE

I was wearing a purple dress. It was the day of my opening. I was a little surprised it was going so well. All I did was paint clouds on big neon skulls. Chill out. All the media attention was because of my friend. Victoria Love. She has brain cancer, a cloud tumour. I dedicated these pieces to her. The newspapers called. She told them everything. She always tells everyone everything.

I wear my best clothes when I go to see her. Accessories, a belt. I tell my clothes: behave, you might end up in a novel. A Québécois novel. Nobody reads in Quebec. No time to mess around. That must be why Victoria Love turned to experimental film. The least lucrative career choices ever.

I listen to music on my big beige sectional couch. Everyone wants a sectional couch this year. There are none left on Kijiji that look any good. Black Friday, black every other day. Pierre Dorion was at the Musée d'art contemporain. Walking through his exhibition was like walking through Kijiji. For ten bucks. Photos of bedrooms, photos of a lot of empty rooms. Paintings, sorry. Paintings that look like photos.

What I do at my job is a bit like Pierre Dorion's work. My new job. Thanks, Victoria Love. She put in a good word for

me. She knows people everywhere. Now more than before. I find adjectives to summarize. I do the classifieds. I turn photos into adjectives. I know Kijiji. I spend a lot of time on it at work. It's like a reference book.

I used to be a museum guide. I had to explain the artworks and artists to visitors. Children in particular. I hate children. I hate anything that shrieks. Easy girls on Saint Laurent and children. I avoid Saint Laurent at night. I'm no martini girl, I don't wear G-strings. I stay home in my little one-bedroom apartment in Pointe-Saint-Charles and do my homework.

I have nine lives, like a cat. Lucky for me. I need them. When I play *Super Mario*, I can never find my guy. They got it right with the design of the Wii controller. It vibrates when you die. It vibrates constantly. I think I do it on purpose, unconsciously. To get used to the idea of my death, maybe. At the book fair in Rimouski, a woman picked up Victoria Love's book to read the back. And then she put it down again, avoiding looking at her. It's heavy, cancer and death and all that. I wish books were more interactive. Like the controller. That books would vibrate at the end of each chapter. There would be no more than eight. But that's not how life works. What is death like? Do you vibrate? Do the words GAME OVER appear? Or is it the whole thing with the white light and the tunnel?

Before, she was Lili, Erection Assistant. She was a lot of things. This book could be called *Your Tarantino Dialogues* or *Special Requests*. She talks about film all the time. She never stopped saying that she was going to write ten books and that she was going to live ten more years. That it would

be called *Experimental Film*. *Drama Queens* is like the book's stripper name.

I'm the same Anna, the one in Victoria Love's first book. Now I am Anna, Classified Ads Assistant, I work on the same floor as Victoria Love. We share a coffee card. We share everything. She's an amazing friend. We go to galleries together. Sometimes we bitch a little. I go into the first room of the exhibit. There's a big pink skull on the floor. I wonder whose skull it is. It's covered in symbols. What's that smell? Like chai. Or good quality incense. Pink is usually not her colour. But she wanted to be a pony. Drama queen. We're unicorns. I hold a highlighter to my forehead. I'm a unicorn. Hold a phallic shape to your head. A pencil. A dildo. It's magic, you're a unicorn too. Like her mother in her first book. Like me, Anna Ketamine, right now. You don't have to read all her books. You don't have to have read the first one to understand the second, but it's better. There will be ten in all. That's a lot. The highlighter is blue.

Blue of Highlighter. A book by Georges Bataille. The obsession with sensation. Sensationalism. A constant. Cheesy sentences, and now adjectives that more or less describe. That describe not well but enough. Only ever dipping one toe in.

We run into Maggie Books at the building's lost and found. I don't think anybody comes here to lose things. She's looking through the hats. Victoria Love draws a cloud on the one she picks. With a salamander in the corner.

"If my legs are like Jell-O and I can't get into bed, I'll slither. In the morning, I'm not a unicorn. I'm a reptile. I slither around the whole apartment."

While she slithers, I'm in my little apartment in Pointe-

Saint-Charles being a unicorn. Maggie slips a piece of paper into my jacket.

Zombie Scripters

A TARANTINO FILM

Getting a beer from the fridge with a walker is not easy. But that won't stop our hero, Michael Jackson, the bandit. Yes, the same leader of the pack who buried an old couple alive with his compatriots, who forced them to reveal their banking information. Michael Jackson, the badass mother-burier, didn't have an easy time in prison. They left him his two legs, but not much else. Hence the walker. What luxury. Close-up of his hand: a can of PBR in a Ziploc bag. Trailer-park style. Through the window, a bunch of zombies, a bunch of green students with paper and pencils. Michael opens his beer, super chill, and sits on his couch, lifting his walker in the air and waiting for them. One scratches at the door.

“Come here with your pencil so I can make myself a straw.”

THE END

Britney Speaks

The idea: a person giving themselves a pep talk in the mirror. "I am beautiful, I am smart, the world is mine."

The body of Britney Spears with a round mirror encircling her face. Next to her, a giant mirror someone's marked up with lipstick. In place of "Britney," there are motivational statements, cool self-affirmations. "Hot mamacita SPEAKS." "Girl next door SPEAKS." "Suck my pussy SPEAKS."

_____ SPEAKS

_____ SPEAKS

_____ SPEAKS

BRITNEY SPEARS

The SPEAKS are all written in gemstones and the P, E, A, and R of the last one in miniature pears.

It smells so good in the apartment. I'm making white chocolate and orange cookies. I need to eat when I'm down. I've gone to a lot of restaurants alone in my life. In *The Waves*, Virginia Woolf describes a table. There are pear peels. I'm obsessed with this image. I'd like to eat those peels. For it to be like magic. I could retune literature with my life. I often make cookies or desserts with pears. That way I can say I accomplished at least one thing in my day. Either I made a batch of cookies or I wrote a good page. I can go to sleep smiling.

I was in the Miss Teen Québec pageant when I was younger. They came over, they saw I was cute, and it went from there. They took my money and, boom, spotlights. The process was simple. We did a series of activities. We were graded on our conversation, our level of participation, our bikinis, that kind of thing. The full range of our personalities, right? On the bus to the Beach Club, a girl told me she called her stupid friend her parakeet.

A few years later, Candy asked me what I was going to teach the world from the perspective of my nineteen years. I had no simple answer to her question. I was nineteen. I thought that was enough. Mathematics. Numbers are so important for people. If you're nineteen years old, you're automatically a little idiot. You're a new wine. Your life experiences smell like cork. Everyone knows that new wine sucks. It often comes from Australia. I have no desire to go to Australia. Part of travelling is tasting the wine of the region. I'll never see a kangaroo. I bought some for my fondue the other day. It tasted like chicken. Rabbit does too. Animals that hop taste like chicken.

Watching whatever random show comes on Canal D is a major activity for dancers who work at bars out in the sticks. These girls train themselves to enjoy doing the same things over and over. Full days identical to other days. Canal D, money, clients, frozen dinners, sleep.

Maude was on *Le Cercle* once, that game show Charles Lafortune used to host, one among many. My mother had bought me the board game. It was serious business. Maude was the first person I knew to be on television. I was proud to know her because of her bright pink hair. I saw Arnaud at my launch. He told me he'd been on the Quebec version of *Match Game*, another game show, this one hosted by Alexandre Barrette. He didn't win a cent. Neither did Maude, but at least they were on TV. Arnaud doesn't have pink hair, but I'm no less proud.

It's happened twice that I was watching *Come Dine with Me* with Britney and she's known one of the contestants because they'd worked together. Buffering. (The Internet

sucks in hotels outside the city.) I also remember getting an email from Mathieu in Fermont. Click the link. The other dude from Incontinental, a band we really like, was the host for that episode. I think he made scallops. Or duck. Everyone always makes duck and rabbit on that show. The Québécois have a really lame idea of fine dining. I'm still traumatized by that tortoise soup.

We all have one stupid friend. God knows I've had a few. I find it amusing. Seasonal friendships. Girls to party with. Girly girls. Some of them more tomboyish. I tried the whole spectrum. Stupid girls are always better than TV. I can't snap my fingers, I can't whistle, I'm useless, but I smile like an idiot and I love them.

My favourite stupid friend is Britney. She's my little sweetheart. When her grandfather died, I took her to Parc Laurier with a blanket, a Scrabble set, and some old carrots so we'd have enough of a "picnic" to drink our six-pack of Boréale Blonde. I got forty-four points on *kiwi* and won. We have some great board-game stories. One time we were playing Cranium and she mimed *rising star*. She'd read the wrong side of the card.

I'm already looking forward to getting up tomorrow morning to eat a bowl of sugar cereal. The sun sets early. I open the fridge and think about tomorrow morning. We have milk, I'm all set. I can go to bed. Daydream about tomorrow, all alone in my big empty bed. Daydream about all that cereal. A stomach with whole-wheat polka dots. Healthy foods dance around me. Britney is going to be happy I'm thinking about wheat. She likes it when I eat asparagus, when I pamper my digestive system. When I talk to her about

fibre, she rejoices. When I talk to her about royal jelly, she makes goat noises to make me laugh. I'm rewarded when I'm good to myself.

Yesterday I smoked a joint with Britney, a tiny one. It was a really bad idea. I felt uneasy in my body. I could feel my liver more than usual. I am a high Care Bear. An overmedicated Care Bear. On shuffle. Nobody knows anymore what does what, or why.

I'd like to grow old. Like, sixty-five plus. To be like the old lady in *Requiem for a Dream* and sit in my robe in front of the TV taking amphetamines. But I know I'd regret it, it would be like with the joint I smoked with Britney. It would seem like a good idea, an interesting experience, on paper, but in reality it would be the worst idea, the worst experience. Provocation is a bit like that. It's always prettier on paper. That's why we like literature. It is pretty and orderly on paper. Order is good. Origami is just as complicated as literature. You find a tutorial on YouTube, you follow every step perfectly. You're supposed to end up with a bird, you get a flower. OK. Too bad. Flowers are more poetic than birds. They're feminine, like pussy. Britney is at school at the Botanical Gardens. Today she dissected an orchid. I was writing. Everyone with their delicate little gestures for the universe. We tell each other about our days. She comes to see me every day. Britney Speaks in my ear. In fine print. She whispers lullabies to me. She puts my face in her boobs. Her breasts are aquatic. I can hear the sea, clearly. It's therapeutic. Drama queen in a plunging neckline. I'm with Britney. We begin our overview of the day.