



# QUEEN OF HEARTS MEETS DRAMA KING

DALMA HEYN ON WOMEN AND RELATIONSHIPS

by Chandra Niles Folsom

**WE HAVE ALL HEARD** the term drama queen and are well acquainted with its archetype. But, what if the term were to transgender? That was the issue author Dalma Heyn dared to tackle in her new book, *Drama Kings: The Men Who Drive Strong Women Crazy*, newly released in hardcover by Rodale Books.

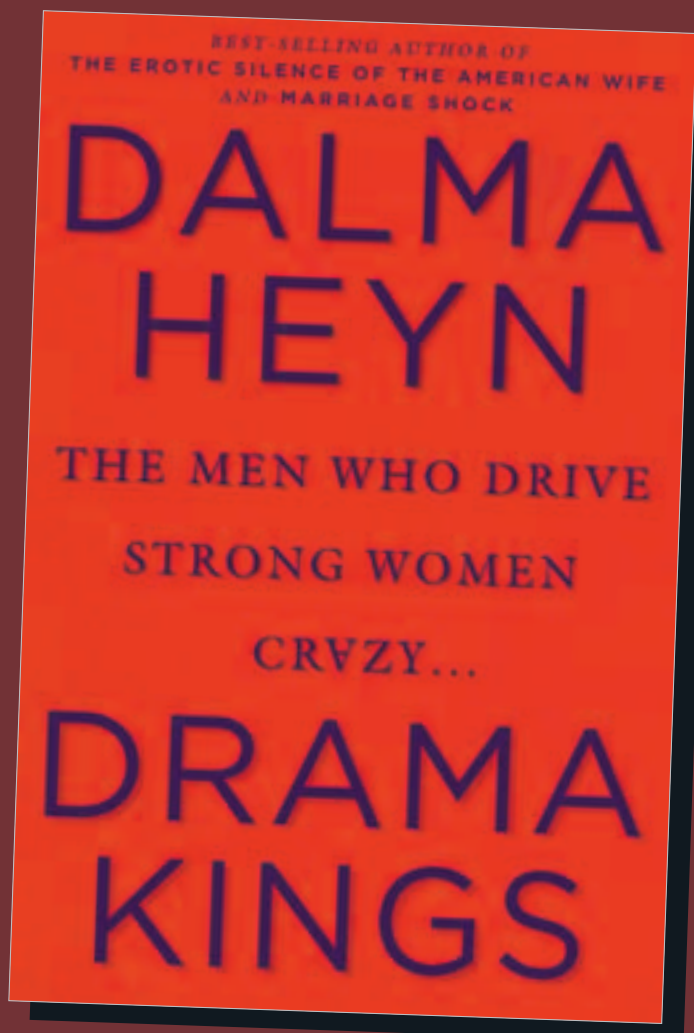
Heyn, a resident of Westport, is no neophyte when it comes to guiding women through the obstacle course of intimate relationships. Over the past two decades, the best-selling author of *The Erotic Silence of the American Wife* and *Marriage Shock: The Transformation of Women into Wives* has interviewed hundreds of women, uncovering their deepest feelings about sex and marriage, and served as confidant to countless more, as a columnist for both *Mademoiselle* and *New Woman* magazines. In addition, Heyn was articles editor at *Redbook*, editor-in-chief at *Health* magazine and executive editor at *McCall's* before devoting herself fulltime to writing.

*What is the source of her inspiration and what does it take to become a best-selling author, in this era of information overload?*

"I've been writing about love, marriage and relationships throughout my career — first as a magazine writer and editor, later as a columnist and essayist, and as an author of three books," says Heyn, who has been writing since college. "Sometimes finding one's niche is simply a question of writing on a certain topic for a long time."

The title for *Drama Kings* came to her during a walk in the woods with a friend. Heyn was wondering why all the successful, high-powered women she had been interviewing seemed to be attracted to guys who weakened them and sabotaged their strength.

"You know, these guys are actors, not suitors — they're drama



kings!” Heyn told her friend. “They may not thrive on chaos, the way drama queens do, but they always create chaos in the relationship.”

Drama Kings finds its nook in the self-help section of bookstores. Yet, Heyn is not completely at ease with that placement.

“Thematically, I have usually resisted the self-help category, not only because my books have been deeper and more subversive, and more interesting, I think, than most self-help books, but also because I believe that women hardly need any more ‘shoulds’ in their lives,” explains the author, whose books have been published in 24 countries.

While Drama Kings is a serious dialogue about the vast changes taking place in society and their impact on women and men, it is also a practical dating book.

“I’m saying to women — sure, go out with a drama king if you think he’s cute, but know that he’s ill-equipped for a real relationship; know that he will disappoint you,” Heyn stresses.

While interviewing diverse women, Heyn learned to hear their stories without superimposing either cultural ideals or her own ideas. She even went back to school for a Masters of Social Work degree, primarily to improve her skills as a researcher, but also to refine her ability to listen and report the facts.

“It’s important not only for obvious reasons — that I want my books to tell the truth, but because women have for so long been asked not to tell the truth about their feelings, for fear of upsetting others, for fear of being thought ‘bad,’ and for fear of losing love,” she says. “There are so many myths about women — about how and who and

These are men who feel their power being usurped — and often blame feminism, or women, or someone out there whom they perceive as displacing them, according to Heyn.

“When I’m on *Good Morning America* and only have three minutes to telegraph everything inside an entire book — a book that contains history and sociology as well as dating tips for strong women — I must choose which aspects telegraph my major points most clearly, and that takes lots of time and thought,” says Heyn. “Touring, as with all experience, helps to refine my thinking. I’m much better at the end of a promotional tour than I am at the beginning.”

However, Heyn never gets bored, no matter how often she’s asked similar questions, because the interviewer is always different, the show is always different, the audience is always different.

“I like the longer shows and interviews, because I get to share my experience in a real dialog rather than just shoot out a clever sound byte or two,” says Heyn. “Also, interviewers of longer-format media, be they television, radio or newspaper, are generally more involved in the book and concerned about the subject matter.”

With her books read by women the world over, who are eager to better understand themselves, it can’t help but make the author more curious, herself.

“I am fascinated by the way conventional wisdom obscures the truth about what is really going on with women — and between men and women,” says Heyn. “When I began my first book, I was struck by the fact that in study after study married women seemed to be in poorer

## THIS MAN IS A PERFORMER, AN ACTOR, SOMEONE WHO STEALS THE SPOTLIGHT AND CAN’T SHARE CENTER STAGE WITH HIS LEADING LADY. HE’S A SOLO ACT — A ONE-MAN SHOW.

when they love. What we think we know and what the culture has a stake in having us know, can act as a muffle on the truth.”

According to the author, promoting a book is different from writing one, because of the amount of time needed to process the material in a way that allows her to speak about her work succinctly.

“At first, I simply cannot,” says Heyn. “I’m filled with long sentences and complicated ideas. Then, over time, I start to understand what the sound bytes are that convey the material not only rapidly, but honestly.”

Even when she is asked to describe what exactly a DK is, Heyn finds it difficult.

“There are so many parts to him,” she explains. “There’s the whole theatrical element of the term — the fact that this man is a performer, an actor, someone who steals the spotlight and can’t share center stage with his leading lady. He’s a solo act — a one-man show.”

Heyn adds there is also the more serious side to the DK, who seems threatened by the very vitality and strength he seeks in women.

“He has enormous trouble with attachment and commitment — and imagines, perhaps, that strong women won’t ask that he be attached and committed,” says Heyn.

The DK is also threatened by the sea of change in our society — the fact that women are powering ahead while demanding more intimacy.

emotional and psychological health than single women — the opposite of what I was taught to believe. In researching this book, some thirteen years later, I learned that while everyone still believes firmly in marriage, there are now 87 million single people, and by 2010, single households will be the majority!”

Heyn discovered that, for the first time in history, women are creating relationships that fit them, rather than fitting themselves into a paradigm of love that is psychologically and emotionally crippling. They need never again choose between feeling strong and being in an intimate relationship.

Dalma Heyn concludes in Drama Kings that women may now feel comfortable living alone or with a man, a woman, or in a “family” of her own choosing, with or without children — in or out of wedlock. Whatever she chooses, regardless of whether or not others approve or disapprove, she must no longer be assigned to the margins of society.

“All that is over,” Heyn says. **CC**

*Chandra Niles Folsom is a Westport-based journalist who writes for magazines and newspapers nationwide. She co-authored Women’s Glasnost, with Tatyana Mamonova, published in 1994, by Bergin and Garvey.*