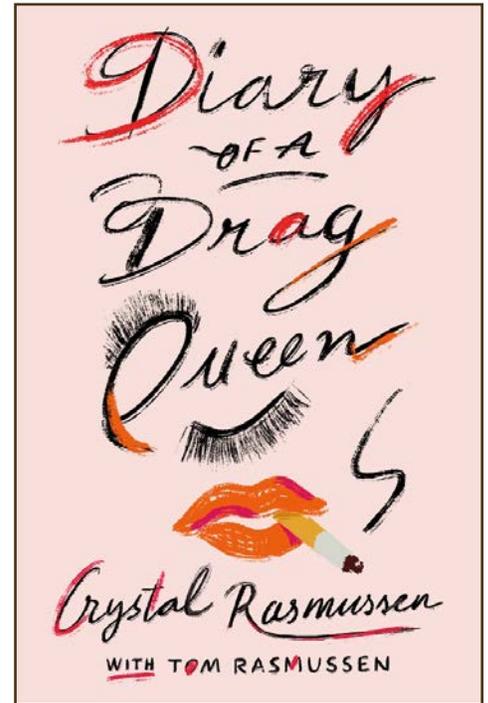


# Reading Group Gold

## *Diary of a Drag Queen*

by Crystal Rasmussen with  
Tom Rasmussen



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Life's a drag . . . Why not be a queen?

When you peel off the sequins and lashes, wipe away the lipstick and mascara, open your heart and your eyes—what does the life of a drag queen really look like? Crystal (and Tom) Rasmussen tell all in this outrageous, raunchy, moving, naked (in more ways than one) memoir about life on and off the stage.

Born into a loving working-class family in northern England, Tom and Crystal find their way to London, then to a coveted, soul-crushing job in New York fashion, and back again. Searching for good sex, good stories, and “the one,” they shag men of all kinds from all sorts of platforms, sell cider to tourists, and perform with their college drag troupe, Denim. They learn about true love from their mum and fall in love with their best friend. Charting day-to-day adventures over the course of a year, we encounter tucks, twists, and unfiltered sexy bits, heinous overspending, body shame and self-love, and endless nights sprinting from snag to snafu in a full face of make-up.

In these pages the previously unspeakable becomes the everyday and the celebrated, and Crystal and Tom make sure we feel every single thing along the way. A full-hearted, full-throated, full-disclosure portrayal of the queer experience that makes you laugh and cry and wish for understanding, *Diary of a Drag Queen* is a dazzling, true performance of a real, flawed, extraordinary life.

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## QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. This book is a diary. It's a book by and about a drag queen. What drew you to the book? In what ways did it surprise you? Did it remind you of other books or films?
2. *Diary of a Drag Queen* spans a year in the life of Tom and Crystal Rasmussen. It's written from the perspective of one person—the creator of both of these people—Tom. But how do Tom and Crystal interact? Does Tom listen to Crystal? Does Crystal give Tom qualities and strengths Tom couldn't muster alone? Does she take anything away from Tom?
3. The book begins in New York, where Tom—fueled by Crystal—is chasing lifelong dreams of a career in fashion. How does Tom's idea of success change, and how is this reflected in the writing and in the shape Tom's life takes? Are Crystal and Tom in sync about what success means?
4. What role does the quest for stability play in Tom and Crystal's life? Is it an aim that feels central to the book, or a by-product of other goals? Does Crystal offer Tom stability, or does she make it harder to find?
5. While the book is a memoir, it's also an ode to and an ethnographic study of queer life and the queer community. How does the book explore these elements? Can we trust our narrator in speaking for such a far-spanning group? Where does the narrator succeed in representing queer experiences that might be new to readers? Where do they fail?
6. Tom moves back to London in pursuit of love. Do they find the love they're looking for? What other kinds of love are revealed in the book and how do Tom and Crystal prioritize these types of love? How do you? What kinds of love feel most essential to you?
7. Early in the book, Tom talks about a man they met who told them to run to something—not from it. Are there points in the book where Tom takes this advice, or where they actively reject it? What is Tom running from? What do they eventually run to? And what difference does it make in their life?
8. Why do you think there are such vivid descriptions of sex in the book? Are these scenes primarily intended to shock the reader? What other reasons might Tom have for depicting sex in this way?
9. What do we know about Crystal? Do you like her? Of course she would say she doesn't care what you think. But do you think she would? Is she insecure? And does her story add up? Can she be trusted? Does that matter? What kind of truth can be found in a fantasy?
10. Crystal is a performer. Is Tom? Why do you think Tom created Crystal?
11. And speaking of performance: Where do you think it starts and ends? In the book there aren't many vivid descriptions of what it feels like to be on stage, but we learn a lot about the before and the after, about the process. Why do you think this is?

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12. Across *Diary of a Drag Queen*, Tom's definition of family is reshaped. How does the formation of a queer family change Tom? Does this new understanding allow them to reconfigure their relationship with their biological family? How? What's the difference between chosen and biological family?

13. What pronouns does Tom inhabit throughout the book? Why do you think Tom uses "she" when speaking of and as Crystal? Did Tom's writing about being non-binary change the way you engage with or talk about gender? What helped Tom's mum better understand Tom's identity? How do you think families and friends can do a better job of approaching this subject and what tools can they use?

14. Did you find the book funny? Were you expecting this? At which part, if any, did you laugh most? Why do you think the author used humor—especially in dark or unexpected moments? Do you think it's effective?

15. How would you describe Tom's experience of class? Does it have to do with education, regional affiliation, or something else? Is this different from how class is described and experienced in the United States? Why do you think that is?

16. What about diaries in general? Is *Diary of a Drag Queen* more than a diary? If so, why did the author choose this format? Did it work? What other famous diaries have you read, and why do we read them? Do you keep a diary? If yes, do you think the aims of your own diary and other diaries are similar?

17. What did you know about drag before you read this book and what further insights did the book give you about drag? What forms of art does drag bring together? Can you think of other art forms that are similar? What are some of the cultural touchstones for drag? Do you have a sense of what makes a performance "drag"? Is all drag performance? And what about the realities, the day-to-day aspects of being a drag queen? The process of becoming a drag queen? Were those what you expected? Why or why not?

**Crystal Rasmussen**, global superstar, is a columnist at *Refinery29*. Crystal forms one-fifth of Denim, the drag supergroup, and is adored for her lazy demeanor and powerful falsetto.

**Tom Rasmussen** is a journalist, a queer performer, and a contributor at *The Independent* and *Refinery29*. Their work has also been featured in *The Guardian*, *VICE*, and *Gay Times*. Tom forms one-half of the radical queer punk band ACM.