



# Stuck in Downward Dog: A Novel

*Chantel Simmons*

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## Stuck in Downward Dog: A Novel Chantel Simmons

In this charming first novel, the dueling worlds of yoga and cosmetic enhancement, gourmet dinners and Frankenberry cereal, self-help books and too-helpful loved ones all conspire to nearly unravel 25-year-old Mara Brennan.

Dumped by her boyfriend, stuck in a job she hates, and living in a basement apartment, Mara realizes it's time for an identity makeover. She devises the "OM List," a personal pathway to perfection that will guarantee her finding the perfect job, creating the perfect home, cooking the perfect meal, and being the perfect friend. Mara hilariously tries and fails at all the things she thinks will make her the sophisticated grown-up she wants to be. Rounding out all of this are delicious details about boob jobs, cooking with garlic, liposuction, eyebrow transplants, and gym memberships. *Stuck in Downward Dog* is a strong debut from a promising new writer.

## Stuck in Downward Dog: A Novel Details

Date : Published July 28th 2007 by Key Porter Books

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Author : Chantel Simmons

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# **From Reader Review Stuck in Downward Dog: A Novel for online ebook**

## **Jenny says**

On occasion, a girl needs to read a little chick lit. That's the method to my madness in selecting this book.

Can you say Bridget Jones wannabe?

This is it....a Canadian Bridget.

Since I have very limited knowledge of Canada and a dear friend of mine recently moved there, I did enjoy the references to Toronto.

If you need a break, I would pick this one up. It's short, sweet and predictable.

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## **Lydia Laceby says**

Originally Reviewed at Novel Escapes

I thoroughly enjoyed this Canadian Chick Lit novel which I found easy to read and laugh out loud funny. This book is chock full of Toronto details which I loved, especially having been to many of the areas she describes. I did get irritated though with the explanations of things Torontonians or Canadian which were put in parenthesis. Perhaps it was because I already knew these details, but I think it brought me out of the writing whereas if it was incorporated into the prose it might not have stood out. Regardless, these dropped off at some point and it didn't ruin the book for me.

It seems I enjoy books written in the first person much more than the third person and it became even more apparent in this novel (with the exception of Jennifer Weiner who writes the third person spectacularly). This chick lit character had just the right amount of ditz, quirk and outrageous situations along the lines of Bridget Jones's Diary and The Shopaholic series and made me laugh out loud multiple times. Even though I wasn't sure about most of her friends or her sister, I loved the character's often painful transformation and was pleased that it didn't all revolve around a man – he was only the impetus for her transformation.

Great Canadian Chick Lit and I will definitely read her new novel coming out next year!

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## **LeAnne Marie says**

Cute, light summertime beach book that nicely threads in the "off the mat" yoga life lessons!

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## **Tiffany Shearer says**

I spent the first 2/3 of this book wanting to beat the main character senseless. The dinner party was hilarious and the ending leaves hope for anyone constantly running into failure.

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### **Heather says**

This was a nice little chick lit escape book. Perfect for reading by the pool!

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### **Suzanne says**

Other than the two Bridget Jones books, I've never read any chick lit. My personal ban on the genre hasn't been purposeful — I've just never been interested. But I think I've found a new answer to the "What should I read?" question that always seems to be more difficult to solve when I'm stressed. Last week was super busy and stressful for me and I relaxed with Chantel's light and fun book. The main character Mara was incredibly lovable and I found her world to be a perfect escape from my troubles. The pop culture references, the T.O. setting, and, *of course*, the yummy cupcakes added to my enjoyment of the novel. All around a fun read. :)

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### **Morgan says**

This book started off well then as with pretty much all chick lit for me I got somewhat annoyed by the main character. Not completely annoyed, just mildly. It was good though, I made it through, Easy. Light. Somewhat Predictable.

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### **Alana says**

I gave this two stars because it wasn't so bad that I couldn't finish it... it was close though. The main character is an idiot! I understand trying to make her imperfect and more "real" but she was just retarded! If you're thinking of reading this one I'd suggest trying something else. There is way too much good chick lit out there to waste your time on this one.

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### **Kristen says**

I had a hard time rating this book. For the first one-half to two-thirds of it all I wanted to do was slap the main character Mara and yell: "Stop whining and DO SOMETHING!!!" so I would have originally given it two stars. She was so pathetic, and she took so much crap from virtually everyone in her life, I just couldn't stand her.

Truthfully, if I hadn't been asked to narrate this book as part of my volunteer work recording talking books for the visually impaired, I would probably not have even finished this book. But, Mara does pull it together by the end, and the ending almost made reading this book worth it so I ultimately settled on three stars.

At the start of the book, Mara is living in a tiny basement apartment in Toronto having been dumped by her live-in boyfriend [via a phone call from his assistant to let her know he's already moved to Calgary and cleaned out all the furniture, including Mara's bed!], working at a job she hates as the receptionist at a plastic surgery clinic, and trying not to be too envious of her two more established - and seemingly perfect - best friends, Olivia and Mitz, both of whom are, frankly the most selfish, self-absorbed excuses for friends I have read about in a while.

Even Mara's family seems to be head and shoulders above her in their lives, careers and successes. Sister Victoria is married to a successful lawyer, with three kids, a big house, a maid, nanny and no need to work, and her parents run a successful cookie-gram business, while Mara hates everything about her life.

Her two bright spots are: yoga, which seems to be the one thing she feels like she's really good at and actually enjoys; and her gay best friend Bradford, who, in addition to joining Mara for cupcake dates, offers her sage advice for creating a life she could actually love, instead of whining about everything she doesn't love.

Bradford was about the only thing I can say I really loved about this book. He was a delight - smart, funny, charming and painfully honest with Mara, while still being loving and supportive of her. He really lets her have it after all her attempts to change her life fail, because as he tells her: everything she's tried to do has been more about being more like Olivia or Mitz, than actually finding out what makes Mara happy.

Mara does ultimately figure things out, and without giving spoilers, she gets to a better place, largely through continuing to practice yoga, and the best part of the whole book comes from her yoga instructor in explaining that the heart of yoga is honesty because:

"Truly interesting people are honest. People who are not honest are uninteresting. They're doing everything they think they're supposed to do in the way they're supposed to do it, but they're not being true to themselves. They're not being themselves. Honest people make mistakes and fail, and that's what makes them fascinating."

That quote alone was worth reading this book, because it's such a great approach to life and living, and I loved it.

As far as recommending this book, if you loved Bridget Jones' Diary, you will probably enjoy this. Also if you live in Toronto you may find it fun, because the book is set here, and the author includes people, places, things, and businesses in the Toronto area, and it's always fun to hear about places you've been in a book.

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## **Ashley says**

I bought this book a few years ago, read it and promptly forgot about it, so when I was cleaning out my closet the other day I thought, why not give this another shot. I quickly remembered why I put it in my book box instead of displaying it proudly on my shelf. It's just not that good.

I have mixed emotions about so-called chick lit. I'm always drawn to the super fun covers and back flaps promising stories about female empowerment, romance or some combination of the two. However, I'm often disappointed by shallow characters and plots. Stuck in Downward Dog is one of those books that I find disappointing. I always expected it to be light reading, but I couldn't get beyond the fact that the main

character is one of the most annoying characters in any novel I've read.

Mara Brennan is twenty-eight and has just been dumped by her boyfriend. She's living in a basement suite she can't afford and is working a low paying job that she hates. She decides that she needs to become more like Olivia and Mitz, her two best friends since childhood in order to get her life together. But here's the thing. She is incredibly self absorbed with the worst self esteem ever. Nothing she does is about finding happiness or improving her life, not really. It's about showing other people up. It's selfish. It's annoying and filled with self pity.

You know, I actually enjoyed the last twenty or so pages of this book. I just had to slog through so much unnecessary drama to get to the parts I liked. The tagline on the front cover states that "it's not about getting the guy, it's about getting a life," but throughout this book I didn't see Mara trying to find a life. I saw her trying to change herself so that everybody around her thinks she's cool and validates her. It's not something I enjoyed reading.

Mara does eventually start to grow and become a more fulfilled person. It's at that point that I began to gain interest, but my God. It took too long. I spent most of the book loathing the main character and just wanting to shake some sense into her. That combined with one too many references to foobies and not enough yoga talk given the title I was about to tear my hair out. Luckily it's a quick read and if you want something super fast and super light give this a shot I guess, especially if you're looking for some Canadian content, but I'm sure there are better options out there.

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### **Jess Van Dyne-Evans says**

Chick lit at its' smarmiest. Unlikeable characters and dumb internal dialogues.

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### **Michelle says**

Definitely Stuck!

Chantel Simmons created a frustratingly insecure 28 year old when she thought about Mara. The main character in this story has no idea what she's doing with her life or where she wants it to go. She looks at her two overachieving best friends and tries to benchmark her life against theirs. She decides to make a list of all of their unique qualities that she wishes to achieve ( learn to cook, get a real job etc). Success but mostly failures follow as Mara attempts to get her life on track.

This book was a quick and easy read. It did have its funny moments, think Bridget Jones. however I found myself wanting to slap some sense into Mara. Personally I would have dumped the two "best friends" and realized what was the perfect job about half way through the book. Having to wait until closer to the end for the character to figure it all out, made this a predictable story.

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## Emily Ferko says

While refreshing that Simmons concentrated her story on a woman who is not obsessed with finding the perfect man, "Stuck in Downward Dog" fell short and felt stuck in many aspects of its plot and character development. Protagonist Mara is 28 years old but never felt over 16 to me as she muddles her way through trying to emulate her "perfect" best friends' lives. Mara's thoughts are underdeveloped and shallow - much like the stereotypical characters that surround her. Gay best friend: check. Friend obsessed with money and appearances and is actually a horrible friend which the protagonist needs to discover: check. Nasty, overbearing boss: check. Ditsy and unaware parents: check.

And finally, Mara herself: insecure, immature, and unaware of the bigger world around her. I found Mara to be unrelatable, which was my biggest issue with the book. Chick lit is a genre that allows for certain unbelievable situations to go unchecked. Take Mara's boyfriend leaving her by sending a moving crew to pack up his stuff, without even as much as a phone call. I can move past this ridiculous circumstance much like I can laugh at the way Carrie Bradshaw is broken up with on a post-it note in Sex and the City. The genre allows for it. What the genre demands, however, is a main character who the reader can empathize and sympathize with. Unfortunately, I could do neither for Mara. Most of the book I wished she would stop whining and start doing. And when she does start 'doing' - it felt contrived and forced; the 'epiphany' moment falling flat.

Perhaps a good effort - but Simmons needs to concentrate her efforts on developing strong characters with believable thought processes and growth patterns.

2/5

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## Michelle says

Hmmm..

After reading the book, I can definitively say that the title is misleading. I enjoy yoga - practicing about it, reading about it, talking about it, learning about it, and so on. I enjoy reading light fiction where a central character has a relationship with yoga. Unfortunately, it's not until the last 25% of this book where the reader sees the main character grow as a result of her yoga practice.

I kept reading and reading this book and wondering where does yoga come in, other than a mention in the beginning that the main character wants to become better at yoga and then she starts working at a yoga studio.

Going by the title of the book, I was expecting the main character to more immersed in yoga, so that the reader could follow along as the character responds and grows through her yoga practice.

Of the recent spate of yoga fiction books I've read, this is not the best. It's a cute book, but it really is more along the lines of "chick lit," and again, there are better books out there of this genre.

If there was a star for between "didn't like it" and "liked it," I would have chosen that star. How about "I wanted to like it, but I was disappointed?"

If anything, I loved how the author shows through her character how one can start a business with little money and lots of enthusiasm combined with a passionate knowledge for something - THAT was inspiring!

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## **Margaret says**

This was a typical chick-lit book: easy to read and predictable. I didn't love the main character, Mara Brennan, but didn't dislike her as much as the Shopaholic protagonist, so I guess that's something.

I was looking for a quick, light read and this fit the bill. I liked that it was set in Toronto, although I didn't like the early chapters when the author feels she has to explain about the various sites in Toronto. I mean, I don't know London or New York like the back of my hand, and authors don't feel the need to explain where everything is or any historical aspect of the different communities.

If you are looking for a quick, light read with a predictable ending (say, for pool-side vacation reading), this would work.

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