



KIM DOWER

Her Pink IBM Selectric Is Our City Poet's Muse

Green is the New Pink

Happy is the new stupid
Depressed is the new smart
Vodka is the new ice-cream
Gelato is the new sex
Sex is the new heroin
Heroin is the new vacation
Sunset is the new Fountain
Gay is the new straight
Green is the New Pink
Pink is the new black
Death is the new death

Kim Dower
from Air Kissing on Mars
Published by Red Hen Press, 2010

Poet Kim Dower has a device in her office that few people under the age of 35 have ever seen. Some probably don't even know its name, but this ancient apparatus helps her create stirring, evocative poetry. She calls it her "muse."

The instrument is an electric typewriter, an IBM Selectric II. What's unusual about Dower's Selectric II is that it isn't black, grey or beige, the standard colors that they came in. Such blah colors won't do for a woman as creative as Dower. Her typewriter is pink. Bright pink. She calls it the "Pink Tornado."

"This typewriter speaks to the world and creates poems," explains Dower, a New York City native who has called West Hollywood home for more than 30 years, save for five years in Laurel Canyon. "This typewriter puts me in the zone, focuses me, reminds me."

When she does her work as a book publicist/media trainer at her company, Kim-From-L.A., Dower uses her MacBook Air, but when she turns to her Pink Tornado, she is a poet. The pink typewriter helps her describe events, people and places in concise, but visual and rhythmic ways. In fact, the "muse" has done such a good job of guiding the lady, she has been selected as the City of West Hollywood's official poet laureate. The second person ever to hold the honor, she assumes that role in October.

Dower's duties during her two years as city poet will include organizing poetry readings, workshops and panels, as well as writing poems. She also has an ambitious plan to create a communal city poem for National Poetry Month in April, getting residents to provide lines of poetry.

"As city poet, my job will be to enhance the presence and appreciation of poetry and the literary arts in the city of West Hollywood. It seems like the best way to do this is to bring the city together with one poem that we've created," explains Dower. "I want to get all the diverse voices across the city, from La Brea on the east side to the Sunset Strip on the west side. I'll give people a prompt, they'll give me a line and I will sew together one poem, à la Walt Whitman's "I Sing the Body Electric." So it will be "I Sing the City of West Hollywood Electric."

I Love a Man Who Exfoliates

Standing in the aisle searching
for leave-in conditioner,
I see him—tall, giant faced
cornflower blue tee shirt
his wife standing six feet away,
holding the cart, his daughter
squirming inside the plastic bars.
He yells to mother and child,
"I want a good exfoliator, something just for me,
I don't want to worry anyone else will use it."
"Here," she says, pointing to a puffy white loofa
hanging on a long string, "this can be yours
we won't touch this."
"Can I use it on my face?"
His giant face must take hours to exfoliate!
What might he be scrubbing off?
Years of sweat worrying
people use his things, eat his sharp cheddar,
housed in its own lock box in the fridge.
He squeezes it to rate its coarseness determine
if it's capable of obliterating his skin cells,
does it have the power to sandpaper
his forehead down to subconscious, I blurt out,
"I love a man who exfoliates."

Kim Dower
from Air Kissing on Mars
Published by Red Hen Press, 2010

“I write poems that lead you in gently.”

The Raccoon on Willoughby

I'm in the city of L.A., on Willoughby, traffic, hamburgers flipping, bellybuttons pierced on every corner, a raccoon wanders out of a stranger's yard, braided eyes, dark mask like in books, his tail like Davy Crockett's cap. He acts guilty like he knows something, looks behind him as he claws up the fence. We make eye contact, I'm still in my car afraid to get out, afraid he might bite spit rush lunge, give me rabies. He's a super raccoon in a super town, alone on a raccoon mission, or a drifting waiter, ex-actor a genie turned into a raccoon, cursed, searching for a prince or princess to kiss, make him human again. I stay in my car watch him from my rear view mirror as he gets smaller and smaller, scrambles his way down the broken raccoon sidewalk to find the one who can break the spell. It could have been me.

Kim Dower
from *Last Train to the Missing Planet*
Published by Red Hen Press, 2016

Boob Job

Trying on clothes in the backroom of Loehmann's, a stranger invites me to feel her breasts, a stranger trying on dresses that don't fit and I can see her breasts are larger than they want to be, and she can see I'm watching, asks me to help zip her up and I struggle to pull her in, smooth out her sunburned skin, tug, ask her to shake herself in, she tells me she just got them, didn't know they'd come out so big isn't sure she likes them, not even her husband cares, he's not a breast man, she says, *he's an ass man but I'm not getting an ass job*, good, I say, because how do you even get an ass job, do you want to feel them, she asks, and I do, so I do and they feel like bean bags you'd toss at a clown's face at a kid's party, I squeeze them both at the same time, cup my hands underneath them, she says, *go ahead, squeeze some more, it's not sexual, aren't they heavy, I don't want to have them around every day*, her nipples headlights staring into the dressing room mirror, red scars around their circumferences, angry circles I want to run my finger around, you should have seen them before *I had them lifted, they were long drooping points, couldn't stand looking at them anymore, can I see yours*, so I show her, so small hers could eat mine alive, nipples like walnuts, do you think I should make mine bigger, and there we are examining one another's boobs, touching, talking about them like they aren't there, don't matter, forgetting how it felt when we were twelve or thirteen, one morning when they first appeared sore, swollen, exciting, new, when they had the power to turn us into women we no longer knew.

Kim Dower
from *Slice of Moon*
Published by Red Hen Press, 2013



Dower has always been drawn to poetry. As a shy kid, she would gather her Barbies and stuffed animals together and perform poetry recitals, reading Dr. Seuss and A.A. Milne. She was entranced when her grandmother from Kiev recited the poems of Alexander Pushkin in Russian.

“I was charmed by the sound of poetry in another language,” she recalls. “I knew it was music. I didn't know what the words meant since I don't speak Russian, but I knew it had emotional power and resonance beyond anything I could imagine.”

She wrote poems as a child and teen, but it wasn't until she took creative writing classes at Boston's Emerson College that she came into her own, truly realizing the power of poetry, which she says is “seeing something and being able to describe it in a way that it hasn't been seen or described before.” Her poems were published in literary magazines including *The Emerson Review* and *Ploughshares*. She also taught creative writing at Emerson for two years after graduation.

Despite her gift for poetry, Dower took a 25-year break. Oh, she would jot down a poem here and there, but the rhymes took a back seat to family and career. However, ten years ago, when her son, Max, left for college, she returned to her poetry.

“There was never any doubt that Kim would write poetry again, it was just a matter of when she was ready,” says her husband, the artist, musician and teacher Thom Dower. “But when she did return, it was like an avalanche.”

Dower wrote a poem a day. Not all of those poems were perfect, but she was back in her element. Her Pink Tornado helped her produce three books of poetry—2010's “Air Kissing on Mars,” 2013's “Slice of Moon” and

2016's “Last Train to the Missing Planet,” all published by Pasadena's Red Hen Press. Her poems are also included in several poetry anthologies, including 2015's acclaimed “Wide Awake: Poets of Los Angeles and Beyond.”

“[During the years of not writing poetry regularly], I created a very successful company and a wonderful family, but I felt something truly important was missing in my life,” says Dower, who lists her favorite poets as Frank O'Hara, William Carlos Williams, Sharon Olds, Erica Jong, and Thomas Lux, who was her creative writing instructor at Emerson College. “When poetry came back, those moments during the day, seeing things the way I hadn't seen them in a long time, the craving for it, it all flooded back and the poems start pouring out. It was like my first love returned.”

Steven Reigns, West Hollywood's outgoing poet laureate, has long been a fan of Dower, calling her generous and unpretentious. Reigns encouraged her to apply for the city poet position and believes she will be “outstanding” as his successor.

Dower's verse speaks of things she encounters in her everyday life. A raccoon crossing the road begot “The Raccoon on Willoughby.” A couple buying skin conditioner at Target on La Brea Avenue sparked, “I Love a Man Who Exfoliates.” A woman showing off her breast implants while trying on clothes at Loehmann's inspired “Boob Job,” a poem frequently requested when she does poetry readings.

“I write poems that people can identify with,” she says. “I write poems that lead you in gently. They're not puzzles, I want you to be able to understand them. They're funny. They touch people . . . poetry should be for everybody. Poetry has given me so much joy in my life; I'm excited to share it.”