

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Kim Dower, Francesca Bell & Alexis Rhone Fancher: Three Poems

Alexis Rhone Fancher · Wednesday, June 12th, 2019

Dreaming Helen Keller

Always the interminable spelling
on my inadequate palm.

One letter at a time, like a slow drip
off the eaves after a big rain,

and me, still parched, tipping my face
to the sky, wanting to holler.

If only I could learn to shape air
into something recognizable.

If only someone would whisper poems
along the insides of my arms,

a hymn sung by fingertips
across my belly, all the way

to the peak of each breast,
my body's rafters reverberating.

Then, a suspenseful little story
unfolding up and down my thighs,

and finally, a cacophony,
both lyrical and guttural:

let my little cave echo, trill, open
like a throat to answer. O, fill my body—

this clumsy, mute organ—with song!



Photo by Alexis Rhone Fancher

Francesca Bell's poems appear in many journals, including *burntdistrict*, *ELLE*, *New Ohio Review*, *North American Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Rattle*. Her translations from Arabic and German appear in *Arc*, *B O D Y*, *Circumference*, *Mid-American Review*, and *The Massachusetts Review*. She co-translated Shatha Abu Hnaish's book of poems, *A Love That Hovers Like a Bedeviling Mosquito* (Dar Fadaat, 2017), and Red Hen Press will publish her first collection, *Bright Stain*, in 2019. She is the former poetry editor of *River Styx*.

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The Delivery Man

would drive his little van down the street,
 slide open the door, his face obscured
 by hanging clothes draped in plastic bags,
 take out his penis and masturbate
 as he watched us play handball against
 the Party Cake wall. We were nine or ten
 maybe eleven and we knew when he drove by
 what it would mean. Some of us stopped to watch,
 could only see the quick movement of his hand,
 but once I saw it all. It was like being transfixed
 by a crash on the side of the road – ashamed
 to want to take in the suffering of others, yet
 bewitched by the horrifying images.
 His grunts were obscured by the traffic,
 but if you went close enough to his truck
 you could hear the groan of relief when he was done.
 He wore an oversized raincoat just like the joke.
 We never told our dads but our moms knew.
 They saw him, too. He's *sexposing* himself,
 my mother explained. No one made me look
 but I couldn't turn away — paralyzed by fear
 and the excitement of repulsion – of knowing
 it was wrong but needing to see how he
 did this thing, wanting to be his audience
 in a sticky white mess of daylight.



Photo by Mary Ann Halpin

Kim (Freilich) Dower, originally from New York City, received a BFA in Creative Writing from Emerson College, where she also taught creative writing. She has published four collections of poetry, all from Red Hen Press: *Air Kissing on Mars* (2010), which was on the Poetry Foundation's Contemporary Best Sellers list and described by the *Los Angeles Times* as, "sensual and evocative . . . seamlessly combining humor and heartache," *Slice of Moon* (2013), "unexpected and sublime," "O" magazine, *Last Train to the Missing Planet* (2016), "full of worldly, humorous insights into life as it is," says Janet Fitch, and *Sunbathing on Tyrone Power's Grave*, just published in

April. Kim's work has been featured in Garrison Keillor's "The Writer's Almanac," and Ted Kooser's "American Life in Poetry," as well as in *Ploughshares*, *Barrow Street*, *Rattle* and *Eclipse*. Her poems are included in several anthologies, including, *Wide Awake: Poets of Los Angeles and Beyond*, (Beyond Baroque Books/Pacific Coast Poetry Series, 2015) and *Coiled Serpent: Poets Arising from the Cultural Quakes & Shifts of Los Angeles*, (Tia Chucha Press). She teaches *Poetry and Memory* in the B.A. Program of Antioch University. Kim was City Poet Laureate of West Hollywood, from October 2016 – October, 2018.

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Caged (Domestic Violence Series, poem #1)

"Birdsborn in cages think that flying is an illness." Alejandro Jodorowsky

He loves me because I look like his mother at 30.
I discover her photo in a secret drawer,
the same rounded hips,

and dark, wavy hair,
her pale, off-the-shoulder blouse an exact
duplicate of one he's given me.

She has bigger breasts, deeper cleavage.
You eat like a bird! her son chastises,
passing me the cheesecake.

Suddenly it all makes sense.
Like when he cries *Mama!* in his dreams.
Awakens empty-armed. Abandoned.

He does not cry for me.

Shoved under our door, a flyer:
"If you find a dead bird, call 1-877-WNV-BIRD."
Lost between the bed and the mirror, I look and look.

He hides his obsession in a stack of magazines
in the bathroom. A blur of a girl, naked,
disappearing in a doorway. It could be his mother.

He locks the door.

Plump bird. Feathered nest.
Force-fed. *Fois gras*.
Fattened up for slaughter.

Someone's dinner. Someone's daughter.

When he hits me because I look like his mother,

he pulls back his fist, takes aim at her caged facsimile.
I hold perfectly still.

We both know he could never hit his mother.



Self portrait by Alexis Rhone Fancher

Alexis Rhone Fancher is published in *Best American Poetry*, *Verse Daily*, *Plume*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Rattle*, *Hobart*, *diode*, *Nashville Review*, and elsewhere. She's the author of four poetry collections; *How I Lost My Virginity To Michael Cohen and other heart stab poems* (2014), *State of Grace: The Joshua Elegies* (2015), *Enter Here* (2017), and *Junkie Wife* (2018). Her chapbook, *The Dead Kid Poems* and "EROTIC" a "new & selected" volume, will both be published in 2019. Her photos are published worldwide, including the covers of *Witness*, *Nerve Cowboy*, *Chiron Review*, *Heyday*, and *Pithead Chapel*. A multiple Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee, Alexis is poetry editor of Cultural Weekly. www.alexisrhonefancher.com

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