

'It's amazing what you can come up with when you think through the possible ways a story can diverge'

DOROTHY KOOMSON

We all wonder where our favourite authors write, how they write and what inspires them. In the first of a new series, bestselling author Dorothy Koomson tells us how she got started and how her love of telling stories keeps her going

'If I waited for the perfect environment to write, I'd never get anything done!'



HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN WRITING FOR?

I wrote my first book at 13, when I was in school. It was called *There's A Thin Line Between Love and Hate!* I used to write a chapter a night and then pass it around my school friends the next morning.

It was completely driven by my over-active imagination and love of reading books and watching drama stories on television. I wasn't 'properly' published until 2003, though.

HOW DID YOU GET STARTED?

After writing the first three chapters of my first book, *The Cupid Effect*, I was rejected by pretty much every agent I

approached (a lot of them!). I finished the book and tried again. I was rejected by pretty much all of those agents again, so I decided to send it to a publisher directly. Two months later, when I'd pretty much given up hope of hearing back from them, I received a letter offering me a two-book deal.

HOW HAS YOUR WRITING CHANGED DURING THAT TIME?

The type of books I write has changed. The first two - *The Cupid Effect* and *The Chocolate Run* - were romantic comedies. The next few - *My Best Friend's Girl*, *Marshmallows For Breakfast* and *Goodnight, Beautiful* -

were weepies. Since *The Ice Cream Girls* I've mainly written what I call emotional thrillers - stories with a crime at its centre, but that mainly focus on the emotions of the people involved.

I love writing emotional thrillers, but I do dabble in romance fiction every now and again.

WHERE DO YOU WRITE?

I write in all sorts of places. When I worked in London I used to write longhand on the train then type it up later. Nowadays I write in my office at my desk or at the kitchen table. I used to write in bed but I rarely do that any more as it's very bad for your back.

I tend to be able to write anywhere, mainly because I've had to be able to. If I waited for the perfect environment to write, I'd never get anything done!

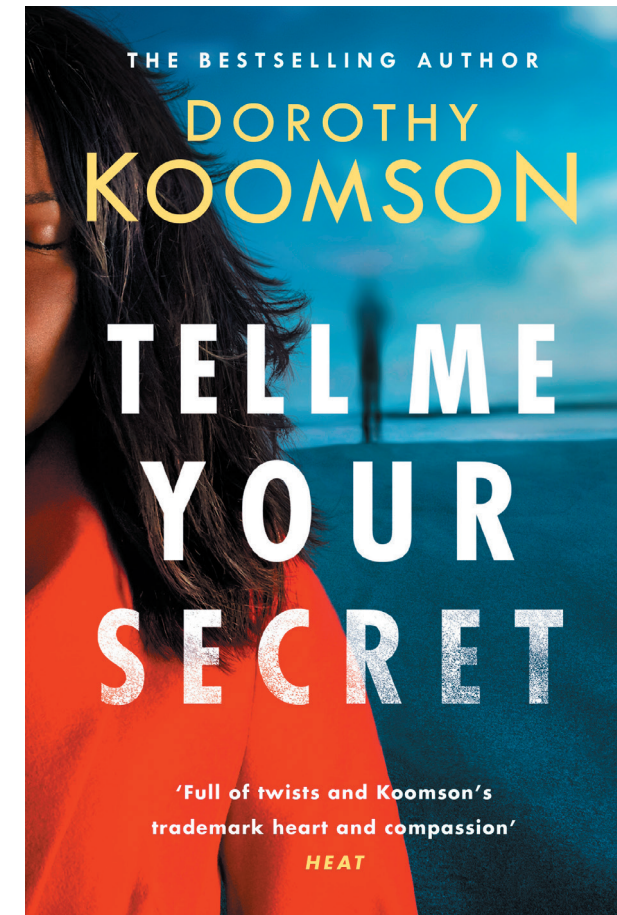
HOW DO YOU WRITE?

My work schedule isn't set. I've learned that it's dependent on the book and what else is going on in my life. With *All My Lies Are True*, the rest of the year was so busy that I ended up having to write around the clock during a few short months - up to six months, including research. And I do mean around the clock - sometimes, only sleeping for a few hours.

With *Tell Me Your Secret*, I had much more time, so worked on the book every day over a longer period of time. It's all about finding the groove that works for that book.

WHAT'S YOUR WRITING PROCESS?

Again, it's all about finding the right rhythm of the book. No matter which book I write, I tend not to start at the beginning. Sometimes I start at the end or the middle and then write the end. Not writing in order or sequence means I don't let not having one bit of the story worked out stop me from writing. Once I've got the main body of the story worked out, I'll rewrite the beginning



then put everything together and rewrite the whole thing.

I'm a total pantser in that I don't plan out the story completely before I start writing. Some of my books are planned more in detail than others, especially *The Rose Petal Beach* and *The Friend* when I have multiple main characters who all had their own stories to tell.

WHERE DO YOU GET YOUR INSPIRATION?

I get ideas from all over the place. Sometimes it's from overhearing snatches of conversation that I try to finish, sometimes it's from seeing a news item, or hearing about someone's experience and wondering if there's a story that can come from that. It's amazing what you can come up with when you think through the possible ways a story can diverge.

AND YOUR MOTIVATION?

I love telling stories. Writing books is my job and that's what I always keep in mind when I'm starting a new piece of work. I'm always mindful that being an author pays my bills, so I have to make sure I always do my job to the best of my abilities.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR FELLOW AUTHORS?

Read a lot; stop talking about it and write; keep going - even when it seems too difficult to carry on. Also, write what you love.

WHAT'S THE BEST PIECE OF ADVICE YOU'VE EVER RECEIVED?

Keep hydrated.

WHAT JOB WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WEREN'T AN AUTHOR AND WHY?

I was a journalist and editor for years and I carried on doing that with my first four books, so I'd probably still be doing that. I loved that job and it's very helpful with writing books.

Dorothy Koomson's *Tell Me Your Secret* (Headline, £7.99) came out in paperback in January 2020

ABOUT DOROTHY

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE BOOK?

I don't have one right now (cop out, I know!)

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE FILM?

Black Panther

WHICH AUTHORS DO YOU PARTICULARLY ADMIRE?

Every author who manages to finish a book - we all know how hard that is

WHAT DO YOU EAT OR DRINK WHEN WRITING?

It varies. Recently it's been super green smoothies and salted caramel ice cream