



# We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves

*Karen Joy Fowler*

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**We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves** Karen Joy Fowler

**What if you grew up to realise that your father had used your childhood as an experiment?**

Rosemary doesn't talk very much, and about certain things she's silent. She had a sister, Fern, her whirlwind other half, who vanished from her life in circumstances she wishes she could forget. And it's been ten years since she last saw her beloved older brother Lowell.

Now at college, Rosemary starts to see that she can't go forward without going back, back to the time when, aged five, she was sent away from home to her grandparents and returned to find Fern gone.

## We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves Details

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Author : Karen Joy Fowler

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# From Reader Review We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves for online ebook

## Lisa Vegan says

This book got me out of my very long reading slump. It was such an easy book to read, yet it was wonderfully complex. I sank into it as I hadn't sunk into a book for a long time. It felt wonderful.

So, so funny. So wise. So psychologically smart and sophisticated. So entertaining. Not a false note, though the very ending wasn't perfect for me, but it was okay. I loved all the literary and psychology/science references. Devastating too as it was emotionally raw. Complicated in a perfect way. It's a marvelous and unique coming of age story, and I love all sorts of coming of age stories. I love Rosemary's voice too, the main character who tells the story.

I somewhat know two of the major settings: Davis California and Bloomington Indiana. So, that was fun, even though there wasn't a huge amount of detail of either, but I still had fun knowing the places.

Unfortunately, I knew much about it before reading it, and this is one book that's much better to go into totally cold. Reading the hardcover book's jacket is fine. Reading book descriptions and reviews is not. I still enjoyed it, but I think I'd have loved it even more had I known nothing other than what's on the book's cover; in other words, virtually nothing.

So that leads me to my dilemma. I want to highly recommend this book to my real world book club, but I don't want members to expect too much detail when they ask me about it, and I really don't want them looking it up. That might be a bit of a problem.

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## Diane S ? says

This was a very different type of novel for this author, a novel that was not easy to write because at any time it could have easily crossed over into the absurd and it did not. It was humorous at times but always at the core there was an element of seriousness.

This is a story that covers many complex issues, 1970's was a time of experimental animal psychology which of course led to many animal abuses and stories, that at times are very difficult to read. It is really too bad that in the book's synopsis it gives away so much because it was not until the second part of the book that the reader is made aware of exactly who this family was comprised of, a feat I found amazing.

So this can be a condemnation of the animal experiments, a warning to us perhaps about overreaching, and at times it almost bordered on the preachy, but just when I thought that the author would pull back.

This is also a coming of age story. Rosemary now a young adult looking back at her childhood and childhood self, a story about the reliability of memory. Does one remember the event or just the retelling of the event? Also family, what does it mean to be a family and exactly what do we owe other family members?

Any way one wants to read this, it is well done, interesting, and animal lovers will surely be appalled but maybe it is something we all need to think about. How much do we allow in the progress of the sciences?

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## F says

I don't know what I was expecting when I picked this up but I'm so glad I did.

I loved this book.

Such an unusual story.

Short chapters.

Learned so much. Lots to think about the welfare of animals.

Very emotional.

I knew nothing about this book going in and I'm so glad. The less you know the better.

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## Robert Blumenthal says

Okay. So if I was to give Karen Joy Fowler advice on how to write a great novel, I'd tell her to come with an engaging, intelligent and witty narrator and have her tell a captivating, moving and timely story and do it in a compelling and original way. Oh wait. I don't have to, because she just did all that in her latest totally wonderful novel entitled *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*. This is a novel that is best read with as little pre-knowledge as possible. It starts out as a seemingly emotionally troubled college-age woman is telling a story involving her apparently dysfunctional family. Around 1/4 of the way through there is a "reveal" that totally changes the way you look at the novel. Those of you "don't-give-away-the-plot" purists would be extremely disappointed to learn what the reveal is before you reach that part of the book. I'm not that way, and still I am glad that I didn't know. Although the change made the book a bit awkward and a little too fantastical at first, Fowler develops it beautifully and produces a strong and important novel of our or anyone's times. I don't want to give anything else away. Suffice it to say that I have read many novels over the last couple of years, many of them very good and some of them I would consider masterpieces. This novel, without question, falls into the latter category. It is a compelling, very readable, very witty and tremendously moving novel about family and life on earth. Highly, highly recommended.

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## Steve says

I just settled a debate with myself. If you don't know the premise of this book already, I decided not to be the one to tell you. As it happened, I *did* read this with foreknowledge and suspect I would have enjoyed it more without knowing the twist. Fowler gets to it soon enough. And if your jaw doesn't drop, expect, at a minimum, to crack a smile.

Sans spoilers, I can still set the stage. Rosemary Cooke is a university student in California and in most ways fairly typical. She deviates most notably with a desire to blend in quietly – that and an odd connection to a fellow student who had acted up in a very public way over a boyfriend. The more Rosemary tells us of herself, the more hints we get of an unusual past. She came from a loving and broad-minded family, but one that ultimately saw older brother Lowell and close-in-age sister Fern leaving home. The circumstances leading up to this are the driving force of the narrative, and a delayed aftermath propels the story from there.

Shortening the summary now seems like an especially good call. With so much space left on the page, short-shrifting premise and plot, I won't feel guilty going on about the writing instead. As the Booker committee

would no doubt agree (they short-listed this for the prize in 2014, the first year American authors were eligible), it's very well done. It's stylish, witty and insightful, as I hope these examples support:

*"Antagonism in my family comes wrapped in layers of code, sideways feints, full deniability."*

*"Parents are too innocent for the Boschian landscapes of middle school."*

*"When I run the world, librarians will be exempt from tragedy. Even their smaller sorrows will last only for as long as you can take out a book."*

*"2012. An election year in the U.S., as if you needed to be reminded, the vituperative tunes of the Ayn Rand Marching Band bleating from the airwaves."*

*"...the uncanny-valley response wherein people respond ever more positively to robots or images that approximate human likeness, until a breaking point where the almost-but-not-quite human gives us the creeps."*

As for themes, I'll remain guarded and elliptical, but will say that they resonate. Family dynamics featuring loss often do. Despite the fact that most readers will have no first-hand experience relating to the Cooke family's drama, Rosemary is such an engaging narrator that we can't help but see clearly through her eyes. A big part of the payoff is witnessing how she comes to view her own remodeled self.

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## Maciek says

*We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* has generated a lot of hype and gathered a large amount of positive reception, including praise from authors such as Ursula K. Le Guin and Andrea Barrett. But undoubtedly the biggest boost of all was the inclusion on the shortlist for the Booker Prize. This year's Booker was the first of its kind, as it has controversially accepted works by authors from outside the UK and the Commonwealth - and for a moment it looked as if the book by Karen Joy Fowler, an American, had a serious chance of winning it. I was not familiar with her work at all - I only know that she wrote *The Jane Austen Book Club*, which my mom really liked.

The award went to Richard Flanagan, an Australian, for his *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, which I still haven't read - but I'm on a quest to read every Booker winner (and nominee), and will eventually get to it as well. However, after finishing *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*, I have mixed feelings about its nomination - I can definitely see the reasons why it was included, but personally believe that it did not belong there.

*We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* revolves around a single narrative development - a big reveal around 1/3 in the book. But the problem is that I'm not sure if it was supposed to really be a plot twist - the book is structured as to not let the reader discover it before it's revealed by the narrator, but the information has not been exactly secret: it's been included in press releases and in many reviews. I've purposefully avoided any information about the book prior to actually reading it - it's very easy to spoil, and I think the overall effect will be lessened if you know this particular plot detail.

And it is this detail which makes the book exceedingly difficult to review, or discuss, without spoiling it for

other readers - but I will nonetheless try to do my best, and divide the review into two sections: one where I discuss the spoiler, and subsequently a spoiler-free zone where I'll present my general remarks.

The spoiler section: (view spoiler)

Non-spoiler area: *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* falls prey to its central theme: it holds everything together, and if we were to remove it everything would fall down like a house of cards. The book offers very little that isn't a vessel made for carrying this theme, and even what's offered is pretty bland. I couldn't relate to Rosemary and be interested in her college trials, and didn't care about any of the other characters.

Although Fowler acknowledges that the issue presented is a difficult one, the book avoids presenting a different view and experience via another character. Ultimately, Rosemary's story, her college experience, family ties, and specific relationship with her sister are little more than a vehicle for the author to advance her point of view. Again, it's not a point of view I find particularly disagreeable, but I wanted to read a novel, and not a pamphlet.

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### **Kathy Guilbert says**

I could not relate to the characters and the choppy writing style! Wanted to like this book, and there were interesting elements, but I couldn't connect to the way the story was told. Forced myself to even skim the book. Am I the only person, it seems, who did not like it?

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### **Julie says**

**Yep, I was beside myself!**

**Kept imagining I was not still reading this!!**

Borrrring ... dulllllll ...teeeeedious ... and more than a little drawn out.

I really wanted to like it as I was excited to see a new release from Fowler. I enjoyed *The Jane Austen Book Club* (although it is one of those rare books where I actually liked the movie better).

The whiny main character (the voice of this first-person narrative) got on my nerves; no wonder she had difficulty forming even fictional friendships. I couldn't form one with her on paper. The dysfunctional family is well done but a little overanalysed (do we need so many pointers to make the reader realise why there are fractured relationships). The animal lab testing is way too protracted (ok ... tell me again in case you haven't sledgehammered the message of its evils into my feeble brain). The timeframe pointers with music and movies were clever, the setting at UC Davis was well done, the cast of supporting characters was charming and witty.

The book is based on a clever twist that for me made "before the reveal" feel restrained while the part "after the reveal" felt laboured and too long.

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## **Diane Yannick says**

Ok, so this book is receiving high critical acclaim, yet I gave it 3 stars. Let me try to explain. I think Fowler's writing is mostly fine. There were a few points where the figurative language seemed forced to me, but no huge complaints. I liked the way Fowler often spoke directly to the reader.

The plotting was fine too. It didn't bother me that she skipped from the middle of the story to the past and the present. It didn't bother me a bit that "the reveal", which you'd have to be living in a cave not to know, is delayed.

I loved thinking about the theme of exactly what it is that makes us human. There were thought provoking observations such as this: "If chimps watch a demonstration of how to get food out of a puzzle box, they, in turn, skip any unnecessary steps, go straight to the treat. Human children over-imitate, reproducing each step regardless of its necessity." The behavioral psychology of animals/humans was often fascinating and always well researched.

What I did not care about was the Cooke family. I was not drawn into the family dynamics of that group at all. I was not interested in their togetherness, alienation and eventual reconciliation. The only relationship that I cared about was Rosemary and Fern. Without characters to care about, I should have read a non-fiction account of the experiments in co-existence among the species done in the 1930's. I saw no value in going into so much detail about Rosemary's roommates or crazy acquaintances. The animal activist parts were especially annoying. It became a little preachy to me.

Ezra, Rosemary's landlord and a very minor character was my favorite. He says, "The secret to a good life is to bring your A game to everything you do. Even if all you're doing is taking out the garbage, you do that with excellence." I already knew this but liked the reminder.

Never once could I remember the title of this book. Yeah, "Life is all about arrivals and departures". I think I better depart right here before some of the rabid lovers of this book find out where I live.

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## **Barry Pierce says**

Further proof that the 2014 Man Booker Prize was an absolute farce. I was enjoying this novel until it went all Jane Goodall. I applaud its use of an unconventional narrative structure and Fowler's humorous prose but the plot just bored me. Like a sandwich from Quiznos, I had to really force myself to finish it. It would be fine without all the monkey business.

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## **Jan Priddy says**

“She’d just rear-ended a cop car and she said that only the week before she’d been arrested shoplifting

tortillas and salsa for a Sunday afternoon football party at her house. 'This is so not good,' she told me. 'Honestly, I have the worst luck.' "

Luck? That's not luck, that's typical stupid choices leading to disaster. I started laughing almost immediately because this sounded so familiar.

I am a longtime fan of Fowler's work going back to *Sarah Canary*. *WE ARE ALL COMPLETELY BESIDE OURSELVES* was a continuous surprise—mysterious, comic, nostalgic, smart, and humane. Rosemary Cooke is 22 in what she calls the middle of her story, and gets arrested for throwing milk in her college cafeteria. She hasn't seen her brother in 11 years and her sister disappeared when she was 5. She doesn't remember how any of this happened, but she's about to figure it out. I don't think I should say more about the story, only that I was laughing almost immediately and crying by the last page. I read this book in 2 days. It just doesn't get any better than tears, laughter, and amazement.

This novel is probably the best thing I've read in over a year, and I am a devoted reader. The main character has genuine bad luck and blames herself for it. She has to get over that. She is born into a life she didn't choose—just as we all are—and she makes the best she can of that life. That's also what we all must do.

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## **Bradley says**

What a surprisingly interesting read.

There's plenty of food for thought, right from the announcement that Rosemary had her "Own personal Schrodinger's Cat," to her insistence that memories cannot be trusted. Even so, these minor reveals are not the important pieces that frame this narrative structure. They may be emotional and harrowing, but the novel is much more than just this.

It's really about our place in the universe and how "Others" fit within it, as well.

I was confused from the very start why this was nominated for a Nebula award, though not so much for why it was nominated for the Booker. The writing is very good and the number of topics and narrative juggling was as smooth as any I've seen.

There are no aliens in this tale. There are humans and apes.

I can't tell you how clever the afterthought works unless you read it yourself. Mind you, there aren't any twists. There are only after-effects.

This is a very psychological and sociological novel set up as a near-twin study and an attempt to obliterate social differences by simply raising both children the same at the same time, but instead of getting a well-ordered experiment, life happens.

In the end, though, I'm stuck in a quandary.

Is there any real difference between Rosemary's brother Lowell and Fern? Chimps or aliens, the question is entirely the same. Is it just to treat "Others" any different than we treat ourselves? And, obviously, shouldn't we be treating ourselves better?



These are the SF questions that I've seen a hundred times, and it's a real delight to see them brought so close to home. We can easily transfer Fern into our own brothers and sisters, or anyone who has mental illness, and see for ourselves just how poorly we treat our own. Imprisonment is imprisonment, no matter how you justify it or rename it. The whole idea falls into a fractal in this novel, applying itself to gender studies just as much as interspecies considerations, or even the episodic stories we tell ourselves to justify the things we've done. Memory is just as much a prison as anything.

Again: This novel was a real delight! :)  
An easy read, too, believe it or not. :)

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## Kelly (and the Book Boar) says

Find all of my reviews at: <http://52bookminimum.blogspot.com/>

4.5 Stars

***“In everyone’s life there are people who stay and people who go and people who are taken away against their will.”***

This is the story of three siblings: Rosemary (who stayed), Lowell (who went), and Fern (who was taken away).

The only reason I even gave this book a chance was because some of my Goodreads friends were reading it and giving it many stars. I mean, the other book I recognized as being written by the author was *The Jane Austen Book Club*, the title of which alone makes me think I'd choose to take a hot poker to the eye rather than read. It probably goes without saying that upon the start I was prepared for a 2-Star quality selection at best.

Holy crap was I wrong. Sadly, this is one of those books where I really can't say *anything* without potentially giving *everything* away, so you'll just have to trust me when I say *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* was *this* close to being rated 5 Stars by me (it loses half a point only for occasionally taking itself a little too serious with the scientific mumbo-jumbo which caused my attention to wane).

I love reading a book that makes me ask: “How in the heck did someone *come up* with this premise????” Not only does this book do that, but it does it with impeccable timing, an effortless flow between the past and the present, and a narrator with a dry humored delivery that made her so believable. Oh, and dare I forget to mention – I found myself getting a little choked up more than once. Me, the woman with no heart. Imagine what it might do to all of you who aren't emotionally unavailable . . .

I feel confident in saying that this will go down as one of the best books I read in 2014 and I hope to always remember that “in the phrase *human being*, the word *being* is much more important than the word *human*.”

(As for the poker chip, you'll have to read the book for yourself in order to figure its significance)

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## **Elyse says**

5+++++++ STARS 5+++++ 5+++++

I have people in my yard --and little time to write a review --yet I could talk about this book for hours. Its a book which will leave a LASTING impression with me on 'many' accounts.

Here is a wonderful line in the book....(I just LIKED it) ---yet its not even what I would speak about FOR HOURS...

Here is the 'gem' (this is for YOU book lovers):

"When I run the world, librarians will be exempt from tragedy. Even their smaller sorrows will last only for as long as you can take out a book."

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## **Jill says**

The most absorbing books I read have a vital lesson at their core: they teach me what it means to be human. Karen Joy Fowler's latest book tackles this crucial theme and by doing so, captured my heart and reduced me to tears.

There is no getting around that this is an agenda book. Ms. Fowler's purpose is to show us—through fiction—that the most complicated animal – the human animal can be disastrous to the rest of the animal kingdom through sheer arrogance.

Typically, I avoid authorial intrusion like the plague. But this book was so compulsively readable, so original, and so psychologically nuanced that I couldn't help but turn the pages compulsively.

Rosemary Cooke, our narrator, is the daughter of a family of scientists. It takes her 77 pages to reveal a central truism of her life (which, inexplicably, is revealed by the publisher on every book blurb about this novel): she spent the first eighteen years of her life defined by the fact that she was raised as "twins" with a chimpanzee named Fern.

"I tell you Fern is a chimp and already, you aren't thinking of her as my sister," Ms. Fowler writes. "You're thinking instead that we loved her as if she were some kind of pet." But that just wasn't so. Rosemary astutely realized that her father was not really studying whether chimps could communicate as humans. Rather, he is asking, "can Rosemary learn to speak to chimpanzees."

Fern is sent away when Rosemary turns five, for reasons that remain obscure through most of the book. But her absence affects Rosemary the way the sudden disappearance of a sister would. By the time she goes to

kindergarten, her mother must work with her to stand up straight, not put her fingers into anyone's mouth or hair, not jump on tables and desks when she is playing, not bite anyone.

Her whole life is impacted by the "experiment" of being raised with her sister Fern. "What a scam I pulled off!" Rosemary reflects. "What a triumph. Apparently, I'd finally erased all those little cues, those maters of personal space, focal distance, facial expression, vocabulary. Apparently all you needed to be considered normal was no evidence to the contrary."

I believed in the connection between Rosemary and Fern. This emotionally devastating book – which folds back on itself to reveal more and more of the story through false and real memories – confirms what I have long believed: that the rest of the animal kingdom has much to teach us in being human.

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### **Elyse says**

Update: \$1.99 Kindle special today! I loved it. --- For those who missed this book - it's a great discussion read!

I'm sure my other review must be around some place .... either way, this book is terrific ... less money than a cup of Starbucks latte!

Where the heck is my original review?  
I read it when this book first came out...  
Seems we had a long discussion going!

I say WOW!!!! Emotionally charged!!!

It's a terrific book club pick!

Much to discuss!

Many side themes as well as major themes!!

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### **Sue says**

I found the Fowler's book compelling and I'm glad that I knew very little about it before I began reading. The story became a discovery....I felt like I was along for a very emotional ride. It is a story of a dysfunctional family, of discovery of self, of the role of memory and recovery of childhood memory in adulthood, of loss, all through the eyes of daughter Rosemary. There is humor, pathos, anger, hurt, disappointment, love and hate, all the emotions you would expect to find between human beings within and outside of a family.

Memory isn't linear and family life doesn't seem to be either. Issues of loss, identity, self, etc also mess with the orderly passage of time and life. This non-linear pattern is reflected in the structure of the novel. I think the power of the story would have been eroded with a more standard narrative. We need to be "in" the confusion.

While there are so many more things that I could say about the book, I'd much rather say "read it!" "experience it for yourself." This is unlike any book I've read before as a novel of a family life and reads almost like a memoir.

The more I have thought about and discussed the book, the more I have decided that I need to increase my rating to 5\* from my original 4. There is so much in this novel to appreciate..

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## **Kater Cheek says**

I've always used the goodreads star rating:

5=it was amazing

4=really liked it

3=liked it

2=it was okay

1=did not like

Which means that I ruin the scale for all the books I review, because most people seem to use the following scale:

5=liked it

4=it was okay

3=it was boring and/or poorly written

2=it had huge flaws, and was barely readable.

1=I don't like the author/disagree with the author's opinion on a politicized subject

I sometimes feel guilty about all my average "liked it" star ratings in a world of grade inflation, and have thought about re-scaling all my books so that they all have 4 or 5 stars.

But then a book comes along like this, where it really was amazing, and I'm glad that I so rarely give out 5 stars, because then people can understand that 5 stars means that this book is really something special, and not merely good.

I can't tell you too much about this book without spoiling things. It's about memory and family dynamics. It's about life at an American university in the 1990s, and about the politics of scientific research. It's about a family in which two of the siblings are gone, and no one will talk about why.

I loved Fowler's wry wit. I laughed out loud at how the family avoids unpleasant subjects at Thanksgiving. I laughed at Rosemary's attempts to talk to people without their would be boy/girlfriend getting in the way. I loved the roommate dynamics. I especially loved that there were words in this novel that I hadn't ever seen before and didn't know the meaning of, as that rarely happens anymore.

I especially loved that it dealt with difficult, political topics without getting too heavy-handed or proselytizing. I liked that, despite the darkness of the subject, it managed a bittersweet ending.

I recommend this for people who like novels.

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## **Susanne Strong says**

5 Stars.

I am Completely Overwhelmed with Emotion. And this is, without a doubt, one of my favorite books of the year.

We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves is the story of the Cooke's, a wholly dysfunctional family, narrated by the youngest of three children, Rosemary. Rosemary grew up in a household, surrounded by attention, chaos and love. She and her siblings were incredibly close, and Rosemary and her sister Fern did everything together. And they adored their big brother Lowell. Rosemary was a "Chatty-Cathy." They couldn't get her to keep quiet. Then one day, she stopped talking. And her brother Lowell ran away and everything changed.

Throughout the years, Rosemary kept to herself and has never let anyone in. No one knows her. She doesn't even know herself. And her family? They barely talk to each other. And they certainly don't help each other. Why, you ask? To answer that, I'm afraid you must pick up this incredibly brilliant novel and find out for yourself.

Rosemary Cooke's sarcasm and witty remarks had me laughing out loud, unable to stop. I was literally, completely beside myself. I understood Rosemary. Her crazy talkativeness as a child and sudden aloof, reserved behavior and inability to let anyone in, which only grew worse as time went on. In Rosemary, I recognized a kindred spirit. I adored her vocab and thought it was brilliant. When I was a child/teenager, I too, used to look up new words in the dictionary (in the days when we all had landlines and answering machines, a/k/a the 80's). My parents let me leave the message on the answering machine and I would say something to the effect of: "You have reached the W\_\_'s, the word for the day is circumloquacious, if you can define it and spell it correctly, we'll call you back." Sadly, no one ever did (define it or spell it, correctly or otherwise), yet I continued to change the word every day, for months.

In We Are Completely Beside Ourselves, Karen Joy Fowler's writing style struck a nerve. To say that the storyline blew me away is an understatement. The timeline jumped from different periods in Rosemary's life and back again. I found that this lended well to the heart of the novel and these truly unique characters. What more can I say? I loved them all. And I hope you will too.

Published on Goodreads and Amazon on 3/22/17.

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## **Fionnuala says**

...you've arrived smack in the middle of this review. I decided to skip the beginning where I might have discussed the plot, the writing, etc., and I'll probably skip the end too because if there's no beginning, there's really no need for an end.

So here we are in the middle, taking time out from the usual review stuff for a little reflection on reading, and life in general. What about a catchy ritzy aphorism to kick us off:

*Books are mirrors: you only see in them what you already have inside you.* (Carlos Ruiz Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wand*)

That's quite a notion, isn't it? Actually, having typed it out word by word, I see even more in it than I did when I first read it. It is very sobering really, the more I think about it. In fact, I'm completely bowled over by it, and not exactly in a good way. It makes me feel as if I've been punched - ouch! - in the stomach...now my heart is racing, there are black spots before my eyes...I can hardly breath...(you see, sometimes (i'm whispering here because it's hard to admit this) sometimes, i don't see...sometimes i just don't see a lot to admire in certain books...i miss all the gems others seem to find in them....so if books are mirrors, as zafon says, does that mean i'm...empty inside? that there's nothing much there? this is a dark moment in my reading life...and it's particularly scary because I failed to see anything at all in zafon's book and he somehow, magically perhaps, knew that I would fail with his book...yes, he knew that....and he wrote that line just to make me panic, to make me hyperventilate, to turn me into a...hysterical...babbling....mess...Help, Help!)

Maybe what I need right now is an aphorism from Karen Joy Fowler's narrator - who is inclined to be hysterical and uses aphorisms to calm herself down:

*Sometimes you best avoid talking by being quiet...*

*....but sometimes you best avoid talking by talking.*

Phew! The second part of that Fowlerism was a relief. I thought I might have to go on and on filling the middle of this review with blank space which certainly wasn't going to make me feel less hysterical. Typing actual words is helping to calm me down though. My thanks to KJF for rescuing me from that nightmarish Catchy Ritzy Zaphorism!

So now that I'm calm again, I can further investigate this problem I have with certain books and authors, how I often fail to see the merit in them that others see, and I'm talking about books nominated for prestigious prizes - so it's a really serious situation. For example, I read a Pulitzer Prize winner earlier this year and it seemed to me to have more in common with the Harry Potter series than with adult literature. I really must be sadly out of step with today's reading tastes, and somewhere out there I'm sure someone is saying that it's all a matter of bloody-mindedness, that I'm too blinkered to see the value of the text before my eyes and that instead, I'm wasting everyone's time harping on about what's missing.

KJF has a very fitting aphorism on that subject too:

*The sunset you see is always better than the one you don't.*

She goes on to say *More stars are always better than less.*

(I think she must be on goodreads ;-)

There's no doubt that KJF is a very positive-sounding person, and as I've spent some not unpleasant hours in her company, you'll be relieved to hear that a little of her positivity has rubbed off on me. So it's a good moment to mention that I'm always looking for humour in an author's writing, even in writing concerned with so-called 'serious' subjects - and I'm talking about humour that goes beyond the annoying smart-ass tone that authors like to give their narrators in order to keep readers reading deliberately emotionally-hyped

content (yes, both the narrator and the content of this prize-winning book fit that pattern). I like to find some awareness that authors know how to laugh at both themselves and what they have created. So I was pleased to find a deeply funny line in this book which caused me to mentally pat KJF on the head. But because the book is structured so carefully around not having its central theme revealed until close to the middle, I'll have to put the funny line inside spoiler tags. (view spoiler)

Although the main themes of the book were not intended to be comic, I really laughed out loud at that line, and...

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