



# The Science of Herself

*Karen Joy Fowler*

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## The Science of Herself Karen Joy Fowler

Widely respected in the so-called “mainstream” for her New York Times bestselling novels, Karen Joy Fowler is also a formidable, often controversial, and always exuberant presence in Science Fiction. Here she debuts a provocative new story written especially for this series. Set in the days of Darwin, “*The Science of Herself*” is a marvelous hybrid of SF and historical fiction: the almost-true story of England’s first female paleontologist who took on the Victorian old-boy establishment armed with only her own fierce intelligence—and an arsenal of dino bones.

Plus...

“*The Pelican Bar*,” a homely tale of family ties that makes Guantánamo look like summer camp; “The Further Adventures of the Invisible Man,” a droll tale of sports, shoplifting and teen sex; and “*The Motherhood Statement*,” a quietly angry upending of easy assumptions that shows off Fowler’s deep radicalism and impatience with conservative homilies and liberal pieties alike.

And Featuring: our Outspoken Interview in which Fowler prophesies California’s fate, reveals the role of bad movies in good marriages, and intimates that girls just want to have fun (which means make trouble).

## The Science of Herself Details

Date : Published November 1st 2013 by PM Press (first published January 1st 2013)

ISBN : 9781604868258

Author : Karen Joy Fowler

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## From Reader Review *The Science of Herself* for online ebook

### Elizabeth says

I had recently read and loved Karen Joy Fowler's *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*, and now, after reading *The Science of Herself*, I have an even greater appreciation for this fine writer's work. *The Science of Herself* is a slim collection of three stories, one essay, and an interview with Fowler. I loved the opening story which brilliantly spun a near encounter between Mary Anning, a real fossil hunter and naturalist from the early 19th century, and Jane Austen's Anne Elliot (*Persuasion*) when the fictional Elliot was visiting Mary's seaside town of Lyme. The next story, *The Pelican Bar*, is a powerful and disturbing tale about a teenage girl who is sent by her parents to a Guantanamo-like rehab facility. Those two stories were my favorites, but I also enjoyed Fowler's essay "The Motherhood Statement," her interview, and the final story, *The Further Adventures of the Invisible Man*, about an adolescent boy's rocky summer of baseball, video games, bullies, and keeping it real with his mom.

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### John Defrog says

Another installment of the PM Press Outspoken Authors series. I tried this one because I liked Fowler's *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves*. Included here are short stories about real-life 19th-century fossil hunter Mary Anning, a teen girl trapped in a brutal behavioral correction school, and a young boy's experience playing Little League and dealing with bullies, as well as a Q&A and an essay on the concept (and recent absence) of motherhood in SF. Fowler's a good writer, but compared to the rest of the series I've read so far, this one is the least "out there" in terms of provocative or radical ideas, or at least perhaps the most subtle. Still, the stories are pretty good and sometimes educational. For me, "The Pelican Bar" is the best and most harrowing story here – it resonates with me since I did some research on WWASP schools years ago for a project. And I learned a lot about Mary Anning. So there you go.

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### Kevin Revolinski says

Great little read. A good interview and a few good stories. Might have to read more of her now. Also, very reassuring to read how similar her writing experience is to mine... other than the successful novelist part, of course. "My regular drill is to intend to write and then spend the day sitting at my computer doing my email and browsing my favorite sites instead. Watching some TED talks. I love TED talks. They are the only place where I find hope for the future. But then I spoil the mood by scoping out the political scene. All the while filled with a faint but ineffective self-loathing because I am not writing."

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### Miz Lizzie says

For those who know Karen Joy Fowler only for her best-selling literary novels, this slim volume provides a lovely insight into her "other" life as an active member of the feminist science fiction community. For those

who already know her in that capacity, her dry humor and slightly skewed way of looking at the world around her comes through marvelously. A few short stories and an interview provide a lot more food for thought than you might imagine. A great volume for aspiring writers as well as readers looking to broaden their engagement with a favorite author.

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### **kvon says**

Various short stories/essays. I'd read the one before about the sadistic school for troubled girls. The one about Mary Harding made me appreciate her google doodle all the more (it reminded me of the stories of overlooked female scientists on DeGrasse Tyson's Cosmos show). A quiet story about a boy who is being raised by a single mother, to the consternation of some in town. I believe she commented that although her stories don't always have science fiction elements, she thinks like an sf author, which makes these sfnal.

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### **kari says**

If I were just to rate the short story that gave title to this little book, "The Science of Herself", it'd be a glowing five-star review; that story contains everything I love about Fowler's witty, deceptively simple prose. However, her essay on "the motherhood statement" felt like barely touching the surface of a much bigger topic (and even that touch might be enough to open a can of worms, and it's definitely a good start), "Pelican Bar" had a great twist and surely made a point, and "The Further Adventures of the Invisible Man" was funny and bittersweet, but I can't say I enjoyed it. Not that these stories are bad; it's just the bar got higher for someone I admire so much.

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### **Jackie Hatton says**

This is a book best suited to people who are already fans of Karen Joy Fowler, and I am one of those people. I thoroughly enjoyed both the stories and the interviews, but this is an extra, not a complete KJF. It adds an extra dimension to my understanding of her as a woman and a writer and it was a lovely Sunday afternoon read. For the real thing, however, her full-length works are a must. My favorite is *We are All Completely Beside Ourselves* but you can't go wrong with any of her novels.

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### **James says**

It seems that I have known Karen Joy Fowler all my life or at least I was waiting to know her. "Back in the stands, I could hear Victor saying how much better Little League would be if the kids made up the rules and didn't tell them to the parents. Whenever the parents started to figure them out, Victor suggested the kids could change them."

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### **Andrea Blythe says**

I wasn't sure what to expect from this little book. I didn't know Fowler (best known for the The Jane Austen Book Club wrote science fiction until I read this book. It provides a set of stories and nonfiction essays.

"The Science of Herself" provides a biography of Mary Anning, who became known for being an expert of fossils, digging them out of Lyme cliffs under treacherous conditions. She kept detailed research about the pieces she dug up and sold, even positing her own theories. Jane Austen is discussed in comparison because she visited Lyme and because Anning would not have made it into Austen's novels. A fascinating read.

"The Motherhood Statement" discusses the exploration of motherhood in science fiction novels and called for more such discussions to be made.

"The Pelican Bar" is a subtly fantastical story about a girl sent away by her parents to be "fixed". The tale is dark and bleak and so, so good.

"More Exuberant Than is Strictly Taseful" is an interview with a random set of questions that didn't flow well. They jumped around too much into too many random territories for my taste.

"The Futur Adventures of the Invisible Man" is a great coming of age story. A man remembers the year he played baseball, revealing how his mom changed the story to suite her needs.

I have three or four more books in this "Plus..." Series and I'm very curious what they will reveal.

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## **Kafka says**

Karen Joy Fowler's 'The Science of Herself' (the story) is comparable with Molly Gloss's 'The Grinnell Method' (see here: <http://www.strangehorizons.com/2012/2...>) Among its many themes is how prying open History reveals the significance of 'the little people' in its workings. More often than not, these little people are women.

The other major preoccupation both authors share is a naturalistic approach to science fiction, rendering it indistinguishable from historical fiction, or the close, sometimes Borgesian study of incidents ultimately shown to be rooted in reality in their overall effect on the reader.

The writing itself is marvelous: it flows delightfully, but is careful about the detailing. This is one of the most difficult things to achieve, in my opinion.

Fowler, along with Molly Gloss and Maureen McHugh, are three of the finest heirs of a very fine legacy indeed. Science Fiction is in good hands.

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## **Dominique says**

I'm pretty behind on science fiction reading, but I was totally surprised by how much I enjoyed this collection of stories and an interview with Fowler. She swept me away in the most unexpected way.

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## Patricia says

A collection of three short stories, an essay and a brief interview with Fowler.

The Science of Herself - a short story about Mary Anning, a young girl who collects fossils on the shores and cliffs where Jane Austin roamed and wrote.

The Motherhood Statement - an essay examining motherhood, feminism, sexual freedom, reproductive rights

The Pelican Bar - disturbing short story about a girl who is sent away to a remote offshore camp to curb her rebellious spirit

More Exuberant Than Is Strictly Tasteful - interview with Fowler

The Further Adventures of the Invisible Man - short story of a boy and his single mother.

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## ?Kimari? says

If you liked this book, you might also enjoy:

★ Remarkable Creatures

★ The Fossil Hunter: Dinosaurs, Evolution, and the Woman Whose Discoveries Changed the World

Both of my recommendations are about Mary Anning who features in the story "The Science of Herself".

★★★★★ The Science of Herself

★★★?? The Motherhood Statement

★★★★? The Pelican Bar

★★★?? More Exuberant Than Is Strictly Tasteful

★★★★? The Further Adventures of the Invisible Man

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## Jaylia3 says

I enjoyed all five shorts in this Outspoken Authors collection by Karen Joy Fowler, but the title story reintroduced me to a fascinating woman from history. Combining Jane Austen, dinosaur bones, Nonconformist religion, and dissenting politics, The Science of Herself is an “almost true”, gently fictionalized mini-biography of Mary Anning (1799-1847), who grew up in poverty, taught herself (and helped create) paleontology, and was sought out by some of the most esteemed scientists of the day, including Louis Agassiz and Charles Lyell, but almost never given credit for her work.

Young Mary Anning would have spent her days combing the dangerous crumbling cliffs of Lyme Regis collecting fossils to sell for food during the time that Jane Austen visited the area--Austen even mentions Anning's father, a cabinetmaker, in her diary. While Austen was on that trip she must have walked beside Cobb wall, where Louisa Musgrove will fall giving Anne Elliot a second chance at love, and she may have noticed Mary peddling her ancient stone curiosities, an idea Fowler uses in her story.

Karen Joy Fowler's written work ranges widely, from The Jane Austen Book Club, about a group of people who gather to discuss novels, to We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves, about a family with three children--two human and (spoiler alert!) one chimp. That variety is evident in this collection as well, which

includes a transcribed interview with Fowler at her outspoken, whip smart best, an essay by Fowler challenging smug gender role assumptions made by authors and literary critics from all shades of the political spectrum, and two other short stories--one somewhat funny, about a boy whose father may or may not have been abducted by aliens, and the other quite disturbing, about an abusive, reality based overseas detention facility for wayward American teens.

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## **karenbee says**

Desperate for something to read in a godless internet-free zone, I thumbed through the books that were already downloaded to my Kindle and settled on *The Science of Herself*, mostly because I couldn't remember wtf it was about or why I bought it, which is always a good sign. Well, it makes things more interesting.

I've never read Fowler before; this book contains three short stories, an essay, and an interview. The interview probably would have been more interesting if I knew more about Fowler, either as an author or a person.

I enjoyed the essay but I don't remember much about it at the moment. I know I highlighted a few thoughts that I especially liked -- it's an essay about motherhood, feminism, some of my favorite topics -- but I don't remember the particulars.

And then there are three short stories. The titular story is a bit of historical fiction based on the life of Mary Anning, and it's awesome. I had somehow never heard of Anning and I'm glad that's been fixed.

"The Pelican Bar" is my favorite story in the lot. Thought-provoking and suspenseful. Girl gets sent to reform school, but it's more awful than that. Maybe saying "favorite story" is false advertising -- I think it's the strongest story.

I don't think "The Further Adventures of the Invisible Man" is as memorable as the other two short stories in this volume, but I liked it well enough. Overall, I enjoyed Fowler's writing and I'd like to try one of her novels.

(three-and-a-half stars)

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