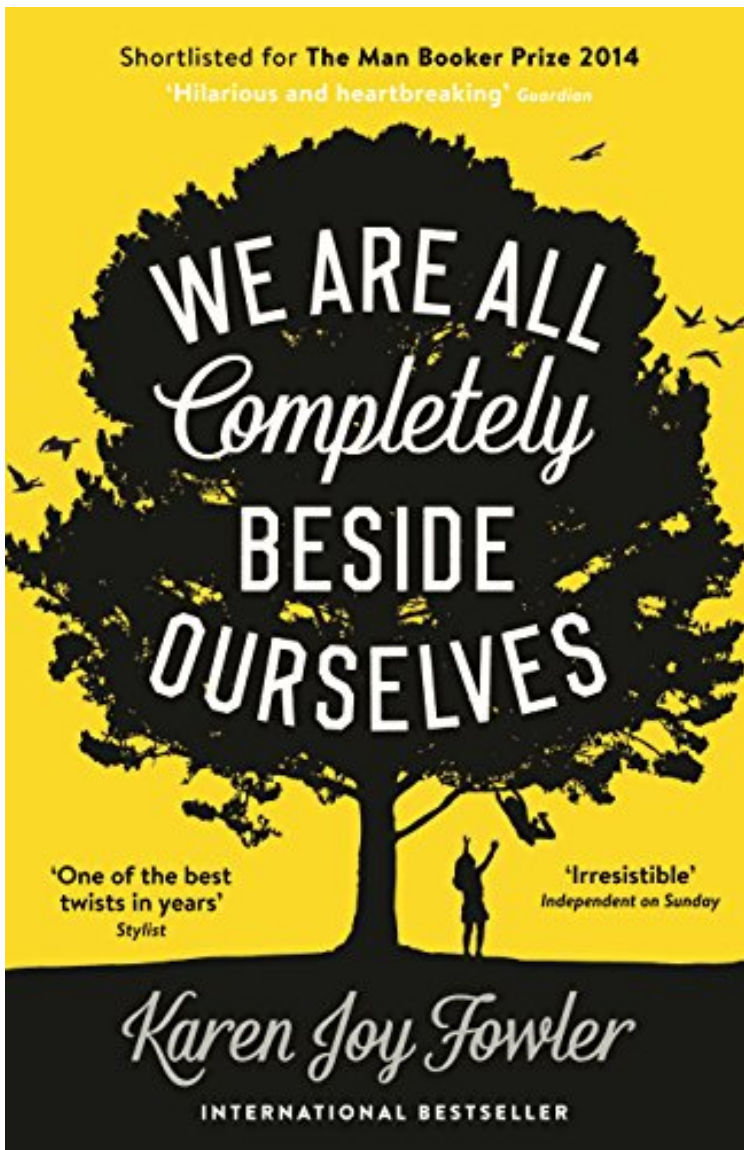


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# We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves



Par Karen Joy Fowler  
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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurShortlisted for the Man Booker Prize 2014The Million Copy Best-SellerRosemary's young, just at college, and she's decided not to tell anyone a thing about her family. So we're not going to tell you too much either: you'll have to find out for yourselves, round about page 77, what it is that makes her unhappy family unlike any other.Rosemary is now an only child, but she used to have a sister the same age as her, and an older brother. Both are now gone - vanished from her life. There's something unique about Rosemary's sister, Fern. And it was this decision, made by her parents, to give Rosemary a sister like no other, that began all of Rosemary's trouble. So now she's telling her story: full of hilarious asides and brilliantly spiky lines, it's a looping narrative that begins towards the end, and then goes back to the

beginning. Twice. It's funny, clever, intimate, honest, analytical and swirling with ideas that will come back to bite you. We hope you enjoy it, and if, when you're telling a friend about it, you do decide to spill the beans about Fern - it's pretty hard to resist - don't worry. One of the few studies Rosemary doesn't quote says that spoilers actually enhance reading. Extrait Also by Karen Joy Fowler Title

Page Copyright Dedication Epigraph Prologue Part One Chapter One Chapter Two Chapter Three Chapter Four Chapter Five Chapter Six Chapter Seven Part Two Chapter One Chapter Two Chapter Three Chapter Four Chapter Five Chapter Six Chapter Seven Part Three Chapter One Chapter Two Chapter Three Chapter Four Chapter Five Chapter Six Chapter Seven Part Four Chapter One Chapter Two Chapter Three Chapter Four Chapter Five Chapter Six Chapter Seven Part Five Chapter One Chapter Two Chapter Three Chapter Four Chapter Five Chapter Six Chapter Seven Part Six Chapter One Chapter Two Chapter Three Chapter Four Chapter Five Chapter Six Chapter Seven Acknowledgments An Exciting Preview of Black Glass Prologue

THOSE WHO KNOW ME NOW will be surprised to learn that I was a great talker as a child. We have a home movie taken when I was two years old, the old-fashioned kind with no sound track, and by now the colors have bled out a white sky, my red sneakers a ghostly pink but you can still see how much I used to talk. I'm doing a bit of landscaping, picking up one stone at a time from our gravel driveway, carrying it to a large tin washtub, dropping it in, and going back for the next. I'm working hard, but showily. I widen my eyes like a silent film star. I hold up a clear piece of quartz to be admired, put it in my mouth, stuff it into one cheek. My mother appears and removes it. She steps back then, out of the frame, but I'm speaking emphatically now you can see this in my gestures and she returns, drops the stone into the tub. The whole thing lasts about five minutes and I never stop talking. A few years later, Mom read us that old fairy tale in which one sister (the older) speaks in toads and snakes and the other (the younger) in flowers and jewels, and this is the image it conjured for me, this scene from this movie, where my mother puts her hand into my mouth and pulls out a diamond. I was towheaded back then, prettier as a child than I've turned out, and dolled up for the camera. My flyaway bangs are pasted down with water and held on one side by a rhinestone barrette shaped like a bow. Whenever I turn my head, the barrette blinks in the sunlight. My little hand sweeps over my tub of rocks. All this, I could be saying, all this will be yours someday. Or something else entirely. The point of the movie isn't the words themselves. What my parents valued was their extravagant abundance, their inexhaustible flow. Still, there were occasions on which I had to be stopped. When you think of two things to say, pick your favorite and only say that, my mother suggested once, as a tip to polite social behavior, and the rule was later modified to one in three. My father would come to my bedroom door each night to wish me happy dreams and I would speak without taking a breath, trying desperately to keep him in my room with only my voice. I would see his hand on the doorknob, the door beginning to swing shut. I have something to say! I'd tell him, and the door would stop midway. Start in the middle then, he'd answer, a shadow with the hall light behind him, and tired in the evenings the way grown-ups are. The light would reflect in my bedroom window like a star you could wish on. Skip the beginning. Start in the middle.

Part One The storm which blew me out of my past eased off. FRANZ KAFKA, A Report for an Academy One SO THE MIDDLE of my story comes in the winter of 1996. By then, we'd long since dwindled to the family that old home movie foreshadowed me, my mother, and, unseen but evident behind the camera, my father. In 1996, ten years had passed since I'd last seen my brother, seventeen since my sister disappeared. The middle of my story is all about their absence, though if I hadn't told you that, you might not have known. By 1996, whole days went by in which I hardly thought of either one. 1996. Leap year. Year of the Fire Rat. President Clinton had just been reelected; this would all end in tears. Kabul had fallen to the Taliban. The Siege of Sarajevo had ended. Charles had recently divorced Diana. Hale-Bopp came swinging into our sky. Claims of a Saturn-like object in the comets wake first surfaced that November. Dolly, the cloned sheep, and Deep Blue, the chess-playing computer program, were superstars. There was evidence of life on Mars. The Saturn-like object in Hale-Bopp's tail was maybe an alien spaceship. In May of '97, thirty-nine people would kill themselves as a prerequisite to climbing aboard. Against this backdrop, how ordinary I look. In 1996, I was twenty-two years old, meandering through my fifth year at the University of California, Davis, and still maybe only a junior or maybe a senior, but so thoroughly uninterested in the niceties of units or requirements or degrees that I wouldn't be graduating anytime soon. My education, my father liked to point out, was wider than it was deep. He said this often. But I saw no reason to hurry. I'd no particular ambitions beyond being either widely admired or stealthily influential. I was torn between the two. It hardly mattered, as no major seemed to lead reliably to either. My parents, who were still paying my expenses, found me aggravating. My mother was often aggravated those days. It was something new for her,

analeptic doses of righteous aggravation. She was rejuvenated by it. She recently announced that she was through being a translator and go-between for me and my father; he and I had hardly spoken since. I don't remember minding. My father was himself a college professor and a pedant to the bone. Every exchange contained a lesson, like the pit in a cherry. To this day, the Socratic method makes me want to bite someone. Autumn came suddenly that year, like a door opening. One morning I was bicycling to class when a large flock of Canada geese passed overhead. I couldn't see them, or much of anything else, but I heard the jazzy honking above me. There was a tule fog off the fields and I was wrapped inside it, pedaling through clouds. Tule fogs are not like other fogs, not spotty or drifting, but fixed and substantial. Probably anyone would have felt the risk of moving quickly through an unseen world, but I have or had as a child a particular penchant for slapstick and mishap, so I took the full thrill from it. I felt polished by the wet air and maybe just a little migratory myself, just a little wild. This meant I might flirt a bit in the library if I sat next to anyone flirtable or I might daydream in class. I often felt wild back then; I enjoyed the feeling, but nothing had ever come of it. At lunchtime I grabbed something, probably grilled cheese, let's say it was grilled cheese, in the school cafeteria. I was in the habit of leaving my books on the chair next to me, where they could be quickly moved if someone interesting came by but would discourage the uninteresting. At twenty-two, I had the callowest possible definition of interesting and, by the measure of my own calipers, was far from interesting myself. A couple was sitting at a table near me and the girl's voice gradually rose to the point where I was forced to pay attention. You want some fucking space? she said. She was wearing a short blue T-shirt and a necklace with a glass pendant of an angelfish. Long, dark hair fell in a messy braid down her back. She stood and cleared the table with one motion of her arm. She had beautiful biceps; I remember wishing I had arms like hers. Dishes fell to the floor and shattered; catsup and cola spilled and mixed in the breakage. There must have been music in the background, because there's always music in the background now, our whole lives sound-tracked (and most of it too ironic to be random. I'm just saying), but honestly I don't remember. Maybe there was only a sweet silence and the spit of grease on the grill. How's that? the girl asked. Don't tell me to be quiet. I'm just making more space for you. She pushed the table itself over, swung it to one side, dropped it. Better? She raised her voice. Can everyone please leave the room so my boyfriend has more space? He needs a fucking lot of space. She slammed her chair down onto the pile of catsup and dishes. More sounds of breakage and a sudden waft of coffee. The rest of us were frozen forks halfway to our mouths, spoons dipped in our soups, the way people were found after the eruption of Vesuvius. Don't do this, baby, her boyfriend said once, but she was doing it and he didn't bother to repeat himself. She moved to another table, empty except for a tray with dirty dishes. There, she methodically broke everything that could be broken, threw everything that could be thrown. A saltshaker spun across the floor to my foot. A young man rose from his seat, telling her, with a slight stutter, to take a chill pill. She threw a spoon that bounced audibly off his forehead. Don't side with assholes, she said. Her voice was very not chill. He sank back, eyes wide. I'm okay, he assured the room at large, but he sounded unconvinced. And then surprised. Holy shit! I've been assaulted. This is just the shit I can't take, the boyfriend said. He was a big guy, with a thin face, loose jeans, and a long coat. Nose like a knife. You go ahead and tear it up, you psycho bitch. Just give me back the key to my place first. She swung another chair, missing my head by maybe four feet. I'm being charitable; it seemed like a lot less striking my table and upsetting it. I grabbed my glass and plate. My books hit the floor with a loud slap. Come and get it, she told him. It struck me funny, a cook's invitation over a pile of broken plates, and I laughed once, convulsively, a strange duck-like hoot that made everyone turn. And then I stopped laughing, because it was no laughing matter, and everyone turned back. Through the glass walls I could see some people on the quad who'd noticed the commotion and were watching. A threesome on their way in for lunch stopped short at the door. Don't think I won't. He took a few steps in her direction. She scooped up a handful of catsup-stained sugar cubes and threw them. I'm finished, he said. We're finished. I'm putting your shit in the hallway and I'm changing the locks. He turned and she threw a glass, which bounced off his ear. He missed a step, staggered, touched the spot with one hand, checked his fingers for blood. You owe me for gas, he said without looking back. Mail it. And he was gone. There was a moment's pause as the door closed. Then the girl turned on the rest of us. What are you losers looking at? She picked up one of the chairs and I couldn't tell if she was going to put it back or throw it. I don't think she'd decided. A campus policeman arrived. He approached me cautiously, hand on his holster. Me! Standing above my toppled table and chair, still holding my harmless glass of milk and my plate with the harmless half-eaten grilled cheese sandwich. Just put it down, honey, he said, and sit for a minute. Put it down where? Sit where? Nothing in my vicinity was upright but me. We can talk about this. You can tell me what's going on. You're not in any

trouble yet. Not her, the woman behind the counter told him. She was a large woman, and old forty or more with a beauty mark on her upper lip and eyeliner collecting in the corners of her eyes. You all act like you own the place, she said to me once, on another occasion, when I sent back a burger for more cooking. But you just come and go. You don't even think how I'm the one who stays. The tall one, she told the cop. She pointed, but he was paying no attention, so intent on me and whatever my next move would be. Calm down, he said again, soft and friendly. You're not in any trouble yet. He stepped forward, passing right by the girl with the braid and the chair. I saw her eyes behind his shoulder. Never a policeman when you need one, she said to me. She smiled and it was a nice smile. Big white teeth. No rest for the wicked. She hoisted the chair over her head. No soup for you. She launched it away from me and the cop, toward the door. It landed on its back. When the policeman turned to look, I dropped my plate and my fork. I honestly didn't mean to. The fingers of my left hand just unclenched all of a sudden. The noise spun the cop back to me. I was still holding my glass, half full of milk. I raised it a little, as if proposing a toast. Don't do it, he said, a whole lot less friendly now. I'm not playing around here. Don't you fucking test me. And I threw the glass onto the floor. It broke and splashed milk over one of my shoes and up into my sock. I didn't just let it go. I threw that glass down as hard as I could. Two FORTY MINUTES LATER, the psycho bitch and I were tucked like ticks into the back of a Yolo County police car, the matter now being way too big for the guileless campus cops. Handcuffed, too, which hurt my wrists a great deal more than I'd ever imagined it would. Being arrested had seriously improved the woman's mood. I told him I wasn't fucking around, she said, which was almost exactly what the campus cop had also said to me, only more in sorrow than in triumph. So glad you decided to come with. I'm Harlow Fielding. Drama department. No shit. I never met a Harlow before, I said. I meant a first name Harlow. I'd met a last name Harlow. Named after my mother, who was named after Jean Harlow. Because Jean Harlow had beauty and brains and not because Gramps was a dirty old man. Not even. But what good did beauty and brains do her? I ask you. Like she's this great role model? I knew nothing about Jean Harlow except that she was maybe in *Gone With the Wind*, which I'd never seen nor ever wanted to see. That war is over. Get over it. I'm Rosemary Cooke. Rosemary for remembrance, Harlow said. Awesome. Totally, totally charmed. She slid her arms under her butt and then under her legs so her cuffed wrists ended up twisted in front of her. If I'd been able to do the same, we could have shaken hands, as seemed to be her intention, but I couldn't. We were taken then to the county jail, where this same maneuver created a sensation. A number of policemen were called to watch as Harlow obligingly squatted and stepped over her cuffed hands and back again several times. She deflected their enthusiasm with a winning modesty. I have very long arms, she said. I can never find sleeves that fit. Our arresting officer's name was Arnie Haddick. When Officer Haddick took off his hat, his hair was receding from his forehead in a clean, round curve that left his features nicely uncluttered, like a happy face. He removed our cuffs and turned us over to the county for processing. As if we were cheese, Harlow noted. She gave every indication of being an old pro at this. I was not. The wildness I'd felt that morning had long since vanished and left something squeezed into its place, something like grief or maybe homesickness. What had I done? Why in the world had I done it? Fluorescent lights buzzed like flies above us, picking up the shadows under everyone's eyes, turning us all old, desperate, and a little green. Excuse me? How long will this take? I asked. I was polite as could be. It occurred to me that I was going to miss my afternoon class. European Medieval History. Iron maidens and oubliettes and burned at the stake. It takes as long as it takes. The woman from the county gave me a nasty, green look. Be faster if you don't irritate me with questions. Too late for that. In the next breath, she sent me to a cell so I'd be out of her hair while she did the paperwork on Harlow. Don't worry, boss, Harlow told me. I'll be right along. Boss? the woman from the county repeated. Harlow shrugged. Boss. Leader. Mastermind. She gave me that flaming-Zamboni smile. El Capitn. The day may come when policemen and college students aren't natural enemies, but I sure don't expect to live to see it. I was made to remove my watch, shoes, and belt, and taken barefoot into a cage with bars and a sticky floor. The woman who collected my things was as mean as she could be. There was an odor in the air, a strong amalgamation of beer, cafeteria lasagna, bug spray, and piss. The bars went all the way to the top of the cell. I checked to be sure; I'm a pretty good climber, for a girl. More fluorescents in the ceiling, louder buzzing, and one of the lights was blinking, so the scene in the cell dimmed and brightened as if whole days were rapidly passing. Good morning, good night, good morning, good night. It would have been nice to be wearing shoes. Two women were already in residence. One sat on the single naked mattress. She was young and fragile, black and drunk. I need a doctor, she said to me. She held out her elbow; blood was slowly oozing from a narrow gash, its color changing from red to purple in the blinking light. She screamed so suddenly I flinched. I need help here! Why won't anyone help me? No

one, myself included, responded and she didnt speak again. The other woman was middle-aged, white, nervous, and thin as a needle. She had stiff, bleached hair and a salmon-colored suit that was dressy, considering the occasion. Shed just rear-ended a cop car and she said that only the week before shed 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. Eventually I was processed. I cant tell you how many hours had passed, as I had no watch, but it was considerably after Id given up all hope. Harlow was still in the office, shifting about on a rocky chair, making the leg thump while she fine-tuned her statement. Shed been charged with destruction of property and creating a public nuisance. They were garbage charges, she told me. They didnt concern her; they shouldnt concern me. She made a phone call to her boyfriend, the guy from the cafeteria. He drove right over and she was gone before they finished my paperwork. I saw how useful it could be to have a boyfriend. Not for the first time. I faced the same charges, but with one important addition I was also accused of assaulting an officer and no one suggested this charge was garbage. By now Id convinced myself Id done absolutely nothing but be in the wrong place at the wrong time. I called my parents, because who else was I going to call? I hoped my mother would answer, as she usually did, but she was out playing bridge. Shes an infamous bridge hustler Im amazed there are still people wholl play with her, but thats how desperate for bridge some people get; its like a drug. Shed be home in an hour or two with her ill-gotten winnings rattling in a silver catch purse, happier than usual. Until my father told her my news.

What the hell did you do? My fathers voice was exasperated, as if Id interrupted him in the midst of something more important, but it was just as hed expected. Nothing. Called out a campus cop. I felt my worries slipping from me like skin from a snake. My father often had this effect on me. The more irritated he was, the more I became smooth and amused, which, of course, irritated him all the more. It would anyone, lets be fair. The littler the job, the bigger the chip on the shoulder, my father said; thats how quickly my arrest became a teaching moment. I always thought your brother would be the one to call from jail, he added. It startled me, this rare mention of my brother. My father was usually more circumspect, especially on the home phone, which he believed was bugged. Nor did I respond with the obvious, that my brother might very well go to jail, probably would someday, but he would never ever call. Three words were scratched in ballpoint blue on the wall above the phone. Think a head. I thought how that was good advice, but maybe a bit late for anyone using that phone. I thought how it would be a good name for a beauty salon. I dont have a clue what to do next here, my father said. Youre going to have to talk me through it. Its my first time, too, Dad. Youre in no position to be cute. And then, all of a sudden, I was crying so hard I couldnt speak. I took several runny breaths and made several tries, but no words came out. Dads tone changed. I suppose someone put you up to it, he said. Youve always been a follower. Well, sit tight theres if I had a choice and Ill see what I can do. The bleached blonde was the next to make a call. Youll never guess where I am! she said. Her tone was bright and breathy, and it turned out shed dialed the wrong number. Because of who he was, a professional man used to having his own way, my father managed to get the arresting officer on the phone.

Officer Haddick had children of his own: he treated my father with all the sympathy my father felt he deserved. Soon they were calling each other Vince and Arnie, and the assault charge had been reduced to interfering with a police officer in the performance of his duty and soon after that it was dropped altogether. I was left with destruction of property and creating a public nuisance. And then these charges were dropped, too, because the eyeliner woman at the cafeteria came down and spoke for me. She insisted that I was an innocent bystander and had clearly not meant to break my glass. We were all in shock, she said. It was such a scene, you cant imagine. But by then Id been forced to promise my dad that I would come home for the whole of Thanksgiving so the matter could be properly discussed over four days and face-to-face. It was a heavy price to pay for spilling my milk. Not even counting time served. Three THE IDEA THAT we would spend the holiday talking about anything as potentially explosive as my arrest was a fiction, and we all knew this even as I was being made to promise to do so. My parents persisted in pretending we were a close-knit family, a family who enjoyed a good heart-to-heart, a family who turned to each other in times of trial. In light of my two missing siblings, this was an astonishing triumph of wishful thinking; I could almost admire it. At the same time, I am very clear in my own mind. We were never that family. Random example: sex. My parents believed in themselves as scientists, dealers in the hard facts of life, and also as children of the openly orgasmic sixties. Yet whatever it is I think I know, I learned mostly from PBSs wildlife and nature programming, novels whose authors were probably no experts, and the occasional cold-blooded experiment in which more questions are raised than answers found. One day, a package of junior-sized tampons was left on my bed along with a pamphlet that looked technical and boring, so I didnt read it. Nothing was ever said

to me about the tampons. It was just blind luck I didnt smoke them. I grew up in Bloomington, Indiana, which is where my parents still lived in 1996, so it wasnt easy to get back for a weekend and I didnt manage the four days Id promised. Already the cheap seats were gone on Wednesday and Sunday, so I arrived in Indianapolis on Thursday morning and flew back Saturday night. Except for Thanksgiving dinner, I hardly saw my father. He had a grant from the NIH and was happily sidelined by inspiration. He spent most of my visit in his study, filling his personal blackboard with equations like  $_0' = [0 \ 0 \ 1]$  and  $P(S_{1n+1}) = (P(S_{1n})(1e)^q + P(S_{2n})(1s) + P(S_{0n})cq)$ . He barely ate. Im not sure he slept. He didnt shave, and he usually shaved twice a day; he had an exuberant beard. Grandma Donna used to say his four-oclock shadow was just like Nixons, pretending that was a compliment but knowing it irritated the hell out of him. He emerged only for coffee or to take his fly-fishing rod out to the front yard. Mom and I would stand at the kitchen window, washing and drying the dishes, watching him lay out his line, the fly flicking over the icy borders of the lawn. This was the meditative activity he favored and there were too many trees in the back. The neighbors were still getting used to it. When he worked like this, he didnt drink, which we all appreciated. Hed been diagnosed with diabetes a few years back and shouldnt have been drinking at any time. Instead hed become a secret drinker. It kept Mom on high alert and I worried sometimes that their marriage had become the sort Inspector Javert might have had with Jean Valjean. It was my grandma Donnas turn to have us for Thanksgiving, along with my uncle Bob, his wife, and my two younger cousins. We alternated between grandparents on holidays, because fair is fair and why should one side of the family have all the delight? Grandma Donna is my mothers mother, Grandma Fredericka my fathers. At Grandma Frederickas, the food had a moist carbohydrate heft. A little went a long way, and there was never only a little. Her house was strewn with cheap Asian tchotchkespainted fans, jade figurines, lacquered chopsticks. There was a pair of matching lampsred silk shades and stone bases carved into the shapes of two old sages. The men had long, skinny beards and real human fingernails inset creepily into their stony hands. A few years ago, Grandma Fredericka told me that the third level of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame was the most beautiful place she had ever seen. It just makes you want to be a better person, she said. Grandma Fredericka was the sort of hostess who believed that bullying guests into second and third helpings was only being polite. Yet we all ate more at Grandma Donnas, where we were left alone to fill our plates or not, where the piecrusts were flaky and the orange-cranberry muffins light as clouds; where there were silver candles in silver candlesticks, a centerpiece of autumn leaves, and everything was done with unassailable taste. Grandma Donna passed the oyster stuffing and asked my father straight out what he was working on, it being so obvious his thoughts were not with us. She meant it as a reprimand. He was the only one at the table who didnt know this, or else he was ignoring it. He told her he was running a Markov chain analysis of avoidance conditioning. He cleared his throat. He was going to tell us more. We moved to close off the opportunity. Wheeled like a school of fish, practiced, synchronized. It was beautiful. It was Pavlovian. It was a goddamn dance of avoidance conditioning. Pass the turkey, Mother, my uncle Bob said, sliding smoothly into his traditional rant about the way turkeys are being bred for more white meat and less dark. The poor birds can hardly walk. Miserable freaks. This, too, was intended as a dig at my father, the enterprise being another of sciences excesses, like cloning or whisking up a bunch of genes to make your own animal. Antagonism in my family comes wrapped in layers of code, sideways feints, full deniability. I believe the same can be said of many families. Bob helped himself ostentatiously to a slice of dark meat. They stagger around with these huge ungodly breasts. My father made a crude joke. He made the same joke or some variation of it every time Bob gave him the opening, which was every other year. If the joke were witty, Id include it, but it wasnt. Youd think less of him and thinking less of him is my job, not yours. The silence that followed was filled with pity for my mother, who could have married Will Barker if she hadnt lost her mind and chosen my father, a chain-smoking, hard-drinking, fly-fishing atheist from Indianapolis, instead. The Barker family owned a stationery store downtown and Will was an estate lawyer, which didnt matter nearly so much as what he wasnt. What he wasnt was a psychologist like my father. In Bloomington, to someone my grandmas age, the word psychologist evoked Kinsey and his prurient studies, Skinner and his preposterous baby boxes. Psychologists didnt leave their work at the office. They brought it home. They conducted experiments around the breakfast table, made freak shows of their own families, and all to answer questions nice people wouldnt even think to ask. Will Barker thought your mother hung the moon, Grandma Donna used to tell me, and I often wondered if she ever stopped to think that there would be no me if this advantageous marriage had taken place. Did Grandma Donna think the no-me part was a bug or a feature? I think now that she was one of those women who loved her children so much there was really no room for anyone else. Her

grandchildren mattered greatly to her, but only because they mattered so greatly to her children. I dont mean that as a criticism. Im glad my mother grew up so loved. Tryptophan: a chemical in turkey meat rumored to make you sleepy and careless. One of the many minefields in the landscape of the family

Thanksgiving. Minefield #2: the good china. When I was five, I bit a tooth-sized chunk out of one of Grandma Donnas Waterford goblets for no other reason than to see if I could. Ever since, Id been served my milk in a plastic tumbler with Ronald McDonald (though less and less of him each year) imprinted on it. By 1996 I was old enough for wine, but the tumbler was the same, it being the sort of joke that never gets old. I dont remember most of what we talked about that year. But I can, with confidence, provide a partial list of things not talked about: Missing family members. Gone was gone. Clintons reelection. Two years back, the day had been ruined by my fathers reaction to my uncle Bobs assertion that Clinton had raped a woman or probably several women in Arkansas. My uncle Bob sees the whole world in a fun-house mirror, TRUST

NO ONE lipsticked luridly across its bowed face. No more politics, Grandma Donna had said as a permanent new rule, since we wouldnt agree to disagree and all of us had access to cutlery. My own legal troubles, about which no one but my mother and father knew. My relatives had been waiting a long time to see me come to no good; it did them no harm to keep waiting. In fact, it kept them in fighting trim. My cousin Peters tragic SAT scores, about which we all knew but were pretending we didnt. 1996 was the year Peter turned eighteen, but the day he was born he was more of a grown-up than Ill ever be. His mother, my aunt Vivi, fit into our family about as well as my father were a hard club to join, it seems. Vivi has mysterious flutters, weeps, and frets, so by the time Peter was ten, he could come home from school, look in the refrigerator, and cook a dinner for four from whatever he found there. He could make a white sauce when he was six years old, a fact often impressed upon me by one adult or another, with an obvious and iniquitous agenda. Peter was also probably the only all-city cellist in the history of the world to be voted Best-

Looking at his high school. He had brown hair and the shadows of freckles dusted like snow over his cheekbones, an old scar curving across the bridge of his nose and ending way too close to his eye. Everyone loved Peter. My dad loved him because they were fishing buddies and often escaped to Lake Lemon to menace the bass there. My mom loved him because he loved my dad when no one else in her family could manage it. I loved him because of the way he treated his sister. In 1996, Janice was fourteen, sullen, peppered with zits, and no weirder than anyone else (which is to say, weird on stilts). But Peter drove her to school every morning and picked her up every afternoon that he didnt have orchestra. When she made a joke, he laughed. When she was unhappy, he listened. He bought her jewelry or perfume for her birthdays, defended her from their parents or her classmates, as needed. He was so nice, it hurt to watch. He saw something in her, and who knows you better than your own brother? If your brother loves you, I say it counts for something. Just before dessert, Vivi asked my father what he thought of standardized testing. He didnt answer. He was staring into his yams, his fork making little circles and stabs as if he were writing in the air. Vince! my mother said. She gave him a prompt. Standardized tests. Very imprecise. Which was just the answer Vivi wanted. Peter had such excellent grades. He worked so hard. His SAT scores were a terrible injustice. There was a moment of congenial conspiracy and the end of Grandma Donnas wonderful dinner. Pie was served pumpkin, apple, and pecan. Then my dad spoiled things. Rosie had such good SATs, he said, as if we werent all carefully not talking about the SATs, as if Peter wanted to hear how well I had done. My dad had his pie shoved politely out of the way in one cheek, smiling at me proudly, visions of Markov avoidance chains banging together like trash-can lids in his head. She wouldnt open the envelope for two whole days and then shed aced them. Especially the verbal. A little bow in my direction. Of course. Uncle Bobs fork came down on the edge of his plate with a click. It comes of being tested so often when she was little. My mother spoke directly to Bob. Shes a good test-taker. She learned how to take a test, is all. And then, turning to me, as if I wouldnt have heard the other, Were so proud of you, honey. We expected great things, my father said. Expect! My mothers smile never faltered; her tone was desperately gay. We expect great things! Her eyes went from me to Peter to Janice. From all of you! Aunt Vivis mouth was hidden behind her napkin. Uncle Bob stared over the table at a still life on the wall piles of shiny fruit and one limp pheasant. Breast unmodified, just as God intended. Dead, but then thats also part of Gods plan. Do you remember, my father said, how her class spent a rainy recess playing hangman and when it was her turn the word she chose was refulgent? Seven years old. She came home crying because the teacher said shed cheated by inventing a word. (My father had misremembered this; no teacher at my grammar school would have ever said that. What my teacher had said was that she was sure I hadnt meant to cheat. Her tone generous, her face beatific.) I remember Roses scores. Peter whistled appreciatively. I didnt know how

impressed I should have been. Thats a hard test, or at least I thought so. Such a sweetheart. But dont get attached to him; hes not really part of this story. MOM CAME INTO my room on Friday, my last night at home. I was outlining a chapter in my text on medieval economies. This was pure Kabukilook how hard Im working! Everyone on holiday but me until Id gotten distracted by a cardinal outside the window. He was squabbling with a twig, hankering after something I hadnt yet figured out. There are no red birds in California, and the state is the poorer for it. The sound of my mother at the door made my pencil hop to Mercantilism. Guild monopolies. Thomas Mores Utopia. Did you know, I asked her, that theres still war in Utopia? And slaves? She did not. She floated about for a bit, straightening the bedding, picking up some of the stones on the dresser, geodes mostly, split open to their crystal innards like Faberg eggs. Those rocks are mine. I found them on childhood trips to the quarries or the woods, and I broke them open with hammers or by dropping them onto the driveway from a second-story window, but this isnt the house I grew up in and this room isnt my room. Weve moved three times since I was born, and my parents landed here only after I took off for college. The empty rooms in our old house, my mother said, made her sad. No looking back. Our houses, like our family, grow smaller; each successive one would fit inside the last. Our first house was outside of town a large farmhouse with twenty acres of dogwood, sumac, goldenrod, and poison ivy; with frogs and fireflies and a feral cat with moon-colored eyes. I dont remember the house so well as the barn, and remember the barn less than the creek, and the creek less than an apple tree my brother and sister would climb to get into or out of their bedrooms. I couldnt climb up, because I couldnt reach the first branch from the bottom, so about the time I turned four, I went upstairs and climbed down the tree instead. I broke my collarbone and you could have killed yourself, my mother said, which would have been true if Id fallen from the upstairs. But I made it almost the whole way down, which no one seemed to notice. What have you learned? my father asked, and I didnt have the words then, but, in retrospect, the lesson seemed to be that what you accomplish will never matter so much as where you fail. About this same time, I made up a friend for myself. I gave her the half of my name I wasnt using, the Mary part, and various bits of my personality I also didnt immediately need. We spent a lot of time together, Mary and I, until the day I went off to school and Mother told me Mary couldnt go. This was alarming. I felt I was being told I mustnt be myself at school, not my whole self. Fair warning, as it turned out kindergarten is all about learning which parts of you are welcome at school and which are not. In kindergarten, to give you one example out of many, you are expected to spend much, much more of the day being quiet than talking, even if what you have to say is more interesting to everyone than anything your teacher is saying. Mary can stay here with me, my mother offered. Even more alarming and unexpectedly cunning of Mary. My mother didnt like Mary much and that not-liking was a critical component of Marys appeal. Suddenly I saw that Moms opinion of Mary could improve, that it could all end with Mom liking Mary better than me. So Mary spent the time when I was at school sleeping in a culvert by our house, charming no one, until one day she simply didnt come home and, in the family tradition, was never spoken of again. We left that farmhouse the summer after I turned five. Eventually the town swept over it, carried it away in a tide of development so its all culs-de-sac now, with new houses and no fields or barns or orchards. Long before that, we were living in a saltbox by the university, ostensibly so that my father could walk to work. Thats the house I think of when I think of home, though for my brother its the earlier one; he pitched a fit when we moved. The saltbox had a steep roof I was not allowed up on, a small backyard, and a shortage of extra rooms. My bedroom was a girly pink with gingham curtains that came from Sears until one day Grandpa Joe, my fathers father, painted it blue while I was at school, without even asking. When your rooms pink, you dont sleep a wink. When your rooms blue, you sleep the night through, he told me when I protested, apparently under the misapprehension that I could be silenced with rhyme. And now we were in this third house, all stone floors, high windows, recessed lights, and glass cabinets an airy, geometric minimalism, with no bright colors, only oatmeal, sand, and ivory. And still, three years after the move, oddly bare, as if no one planned to be here long. I recognized my rocks, but not the dresser beneath them, nor the bedspread, which was a quilted velvet-gray, nor the painting on the walls something murky in blues and black lilies and swans, or maybe seaweed and fish, or maybe planets and comets. The geodes did not look as if they belonged here and I wondered if theyd been brought out for my visit and would be boxed up as soon as I left. I had a momentary suspicion that the whole thing was an intricate charade. When I left, my parents would go back to their real house, the one with no room for me in it. Mom sat on the bed and I put down my pencil. Surely there was preliminary, throat-clearing conversation, but I dont remember. Probably, It hurts your father when you dont talk to him. You think he doesnt notice, but he does. This is a holiday classic like Its a Wonderful Life, we rarely get through the season without

it. Eventually she got to her point. Dad and I have been talking about my old journals, she said, and what I ought to do with them. I still feel they're sort of private, but your father thinks they should go to a library.

Maybe one of those collections that can't be opened until fifty years after your death, though I hear that libraries don't really like that. Maybe we could make an exception for family. I'd been taken by surprise. My mother was almost, but not quite, talking about things we absolutely, resolutely did not talk about. The past. Heart clicking loudly, I answered by rote. You should do whatever you want, Mom, I said. What Dad wants isn't relevant. She gave me a quick, unhappy look. I'm not asking for your advice, dear. I've decided to give them to you. Your dad is probably right that some library would take them, though I think he remembers them as more scientific than they are. Anyway. The choice is yours. Maybe you don't want them. Maybe you're still not ready. Toss them if you like, make paper hats. I promise never to ask. I struggled to say something to her, something that would acknowledge the gesture without opening the subject. Even now, even with years of forewarning, I can't think just how I might have done that. I hope I said something graceful, something generous, but it doesn't seem likely. What I remember next is my father joining us in the guest room with a present, a fortune he'd gotten in a cookie months ago and saved in his wallet, because he said it was obviously for me. Don't forget, you are always on our minds. There are moments when history and memory seem like a mist, as if what really happened matters less than what should have happened. The mist lifts and suddenly there we are, my good parents and their good children, their grateful children who phone for no reason but to talk, say their good-nights with a kiss, and look forward to home on the holidays. I see how, in a family like mine, love doesn't have to be earned and it can't be lost. Just for a moment, I see us that way; I see us all. Restored and repaired. Reunited. Refulgent.

*Four Revue de presse* Praise for *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* A novel so readably juicy and surreptitiously smart, it deserves all the attention it can get...[Its] fresh diction and madcap plot bend the tone toward comedy, but it never mislays its solemn *raison d'être*. Monkeyshines aside, this is a story of Everyfamily in which loss engraves relationships, truth is a soulful stalker and coming-of-age means facing down the mirror, recognizing the shape-shifting notion of self. Barbara Kingsolver, *The New York Times Book Review* Fowler's interests here are in what sets humans apart from their fellow primates. Cognitive, language and memory skills all come into playful question. But the heart of the novel and it has a big, warm, loudly beating heart throughout is in its gradually pieced-together tale of family togetherness, disruption and reconciliation. *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* is Fowler at her best, mixing cerebral and emotional appeal together in an utterly captivating manner. *The Seattle Times* Elegantly and humorously orchestrated...Knitting together Rosemary's at times poignant, at times hilarious scraps of uncovered memories, Fowler creates a fantastical tale of raw, animalistic love. *O, The Oprah Magazine* [The novel] lies somewhere between psychological thriller, scientific theory and coming-of-age story, a seemingly untenable combination. But Fowler, through wit and mastery of her craft, handles the complexity effortlessly. *USA Today* This brave, bold, shattering novel reminds us what it means to be human, in the best and worst sense. *The Miami Herald* Rosemary's voice vulnerable, angry, shockingly honest is so compelling and the cast of characters, including Fern, irresistible. A fantastic novel: technically and intellectually complex, while emotionally gripping. Kirkus (starred review) Piquant humor, refulgent language, a canny plot rooted in real-life experiences, an irresistible narrator, threshing insights, and tender emotions Fowler has outdone herself in this deeply inquisitive, cage-rattling novel. *Booklist* (starred review) A strong, unsettling novel...Fowler explores the depths of human emotions and delivers a tragic love story that captures our hearts. *Library Journal* (starred review) Rosemary's experience [is] a fascinating basis for insight into memory, the mind, and human development. *Publishers Weekly* In this curious, wonderfully intelligent novel, Karen Joy Fowler brings to life a most unusual family. Wonderful Fern, wonderful Rosemary! Through them we feel what it means to be a human animal. Andrea Barrett, author of *Servants of the Map* and *Ship Fever* Karen Joy Fowler has written the book she's always had in her to write. With all the quiet strangeness of her amazing *Sarah Canary*, and all the breezy wit and skill of her beloved *Jane Austen Book Club*, and a new, urgent gravity, she has told the story of an American family. An unusual family but aren't all families unusual? A very American, an only-in-America family and yet an everywhere family, whose children, parents, siblings, love one another very much, and damage one another badly. Does the love survive the damage? Will human beings survive the damage they do to the world they love so much? This is a strong, deep, sweet novel. Ursula K. Le Guin, author of *Lavinia*, *The Unreal and the Real*, and the *Earthsea Cycle* *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* is a dark cautionary tale hanging out, incognito-style, in what at first seems a traditional family narrative. It is anything but. This novel is deliciously jaunty in tone and disturbing in

material. Karen Joy Fowler tells the story of how one animalthe animal of mancan simultaneously destroy and expand our notion of what is possible.Alice Sebold, New York Times-bestselling author of The Lovely Bones and The Almost Moon You know how people say something is incredible or unbelievable when they mean it's excellent? Well, Karen Joy Fowler's new book is excellent: utterly believable and completely credible - a funny, moving, entertaining novel that is also an important and unblinking review of a shameful chapter in the history of science.Dr. Mary Doria Russell, biological anthropologist and author of The Sparrow and Doc Its been years since Ive felt so passionate about a book. When I finished at 3 a.m., I wept, then I woke up the next morning, reread the ending, and cried all over again.Ruth Ozeki, author of My Year of Meats and A Tale for the Time Being This unforgettable novel is a dark and beautiful journey into the heart of a family, an exploration of the meanings of memory,a study of what it means to be human. In the end the book doesn't just break your heart;it takes your heart and won't give it back.Dan Chaon,author of Await Your Replyand Stay Awake A funny, stingingly smart, and heartbreaking book. Among other things, it's about love, family, loss, and secrets; the acquisition and the loss of language. It's also about two sisters, Rosemary and Fern, who are unlike any other sisters you've ever met before.Kelly Link, author of Stranger Things Happen and Pretty Monsters