Wit's End

by Karen Joy Fowler



About the Book

From the author of the runaway bestseller **The Jane Austen Book Club**comes a sly and clever novel of mystery, intrigue, and virtual reality.

Set in contemporary Santa Cruz, **Wit?s End** opens as Rima Lanisell arrives at her godmother?s old Victorian mansion, weary from her recent losses --- an inventive if at times irritating father, a beloved brother. (Indeed, Rima seems to lose people and things habitually --- sunglasses and keys, lovers and family members.) At loose ends, she has come to coastal California to regroup and to meet that legendary godmother. She soon finds herself enmeshed in a household of eccentrics: a formerly alcoholic cook and her irksome son, two quirky dog-walkers, a mysterious stalker, and of course, godmother Addison Early, a secretive and feisty bestselling mystery writer who once knew Rima?s father well. Perhaps too well. Rima is on a mission to discover just what their relationship was all about.

That won?t be easy. Over the years, Addison has fought fiercely to protect her work and her privacy, even as her passionate fans have become ever more intrusive. In this age of the Internet, with its blogs, chat rooms, and websites, its Wikipedia, false personas, and hidden identities, those fans have begun to take over her plotlines and the life of her famous fictional detective. For many of those fans, Maxwell Lane is more real than Addison herself. So **Wit?s End** is also a highly original take on the way dedicated readers appropriate their favorite books, perhaps the one act of theft applauded the world over --- except by authors. Word has it that Addison is so beleaguered, so distracted by her fans? Web postings that she has writers block.

Traveling back into the past, firmly rooted in the present, **Wit?s End** is storytelling at its best. It is also Karen Joy Fowler at her most subversive and witty, creating characters both oddball and endearing in a voice that is utterly and memorably her own.

Discussion Guide

1. In the first pages of the novel, Rima recalls having once read that ?when someone important to you dies, they come back in a dream to say good-bye? --- but that she has yet to hear from any of her lost family members. How does this sense of unresolved loss motivate her actions throughout the story? Is Oliver?s ?guidance? to Rima as she unravels her father?s past a form of the ?good-bye? she has been waiting for?

2. Addison says that novels will be an unreliable source of information for future historians because ?No one in novels watches TV.? **Wit?s End**, however, includes numerous references to television and television watching. How do these references add to the novel?s sense of realism? What do the characters? preferences in movies and television shows reveal about them?

3. Discuss the author?s depiction of Santa Cruz. How does she evoke the unique atmosphere and character of this city? How important is this setting to the story? Could you imagine it taking place in another locale?

4. Rima returns many times to a question her father once asked her: ?Would you want to be remembered as you were or as better than you were?? Consider the overall themes of the novel in the context of this question. How do you think each of the characters would answer it?

5. Rima?s feelings for Martin remain in flux throughout the book: ?she liked him and then she didn?t like him and then she liked him.? Ultimately, she realizes that her grief over Oliver?s death --- and Martin?s similarities to him --- is the source of her ambivalence. How do you think their relationship will develop? Does she truly think of Martin as her ?little brother,? or might they eventually develop a romantic relationship?

6. Consider the character of Pamela Price. Though she goes to some lengths to demonstrate that blackmail is not her motivation, her infatuation with Addison?s past clearly borders on obsession. Is she dangerously deranged, or simply an overly zealous fan? If Addison had encountered her at Holy City instead of Rima, do you think the scene could have turned violent?

7. Wit?s End is set during a very specific moment in recent history: the 2006 mid-term elections that saw Democrats take the majority in the United States Congress. Why do you think the author chose to highlight these events in the novel? How do the characters? discussions of political events inform our understanding of them?

8. Discuss the author?s use of humor. Why did the author choose to employ wit as much as pathos in telling this story? Is the novel?s title ironic?

Author Bio

Karen Joy Fowler, a PEN/Faulkner and California Book Award winner, is the author of six novels (two of them *New York Times* bestsellers) and four short story collections. She has been a Dublin IMPAC nominee, and was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize in 2014. She lives in Santa Cruz, California.

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