



# WHAT THE FIREFLIES KNEW

by Kai Harris

**\*now available in paperback\***

“Harris rewrites the coming-of-age story with Black girlhood at the center.”  
—*New York Times Book Review*

"[A] sensitive, realistic portrait of a ten-year-old trying to understand her world in the wake of her father's death. Sent to spend the summer with a grandfather she barely knows, she contends with her losses and fears while learning more about her family, finding her own voice in the process."  
—*The Washington Post*

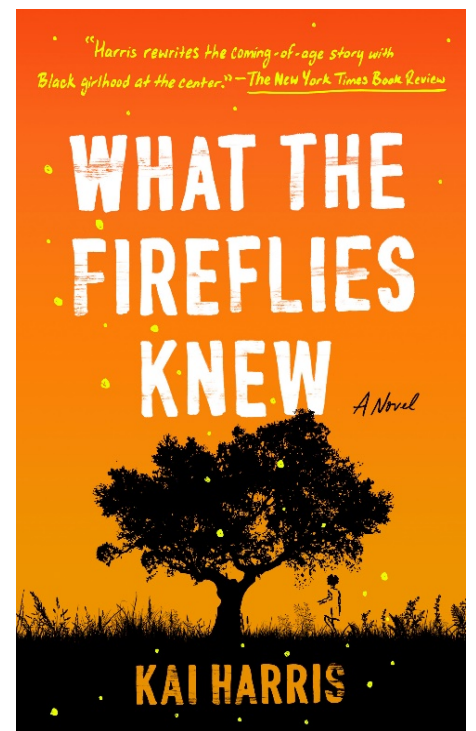
"[*What the Fireflies Knew*] is not an easy read . . . but it feels authentic, and does what good fiction does: takes readers on a journey they otherwise wouldn't travel."  
—*Associated Press*

"*What the Fireflies Knew* is the best novel I have read in a long time, and Harris has brilliantly captured KB's voice. She jumps off the page so strongly that I was invested not only from the first page but, indeed, the first sentence."  
—*Free Lance-Star*

**WHAT THE FIREFLIES KNEW** (on-sale February 7, 2023), the beautiful and heartbreakingly honest coming-of-age novel by Kai Harris, introduced readers to the unforgettable voice of almost eleven-year-old KB, is now available in paperback. *The New York Times Book Review* praised “Harris rewrites the coming-of-age story with Black girlhood at the center.”

**WHAT THE FIREFLIES KNEW** began as a short story Harris wrote in memory of her own grandfather, who she used to visit with her sister in Lansing, Michigan during the summer. She wanted to capture the essence of those quiet summers, and what it felt like, looked and sounded and smelled like, to be a Black girl. **WHAT THE FIREFLIES KNEW**, her stunning debut novel, shows the nuance, trauma, and joy of Black girlhood through a simple and poignant tale of a girl's summer—the summer after she lost her father, and the summer before she found herself.

June, 1995. After her father dies of an overdose and the debts incurred from his addiction cause the loss of the family home in Detroit, Kenyatta Bernice (KB) and her teenage sister, Nia, are sent by their overwhelmed mother to live with their estranged grandfather in Lansing. Over the course of a single, sweltering summer, KB attempts to get her bearings in a world that has turned upside down—a father who is labeled a fiend; a mother whose smile no longer reaches her eyes; a sister, once her best friend, who has crossed the threshold of adolescence and suddenly wants nothing to do with her; a grandfather who is grumpy and silent; the white kids across the street who are friendly, but only sometimes. And all of them are keeping secrets. Pinballing between resentment, abandonment, and loneliness, KB is forced to carve out a different identity for herself and find her own voice. As she examines the jagged pieces of her recently shattered world, she learns that while some truths cut deep, a new life—and a new KB—can be built from the shards.



Capturing all the vulnerability, perceptiveness, and inquisitiveness of a young Black girl on the cusp of puberty, Harris's prose perfectly inhabits that hazy space between childhood and adolescence, where everything that was once familiar develops a veneer of strangeness when seen through newer, older eyes. Through KB's disillusionment and subsequent discovery of her own power, **WHAT THE FIREFLIES KNEW** poignantly reveals that heartbreaking but necessary component of growing up—the realization that loved ones can be flawed, sometimes significantly so, and that the perfect family we all dream of looks different up close.

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## WHAT THE FIREFLIES KNEW

By Kai Harris

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Also available as an eBook and audiobook

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

**Kai Harris** is a writer and educator from Detroit, Michigan, who uses her voice to uplift the Black community through realistic fiction centered on the Black experience. She resides in the Bay Area with her husband, three daughters, and dog, Tabasco, where she is an assistant professor of creative writing at Santa Clara University.

### About Tiny Reparations Books:

Plume has partnered with *New York Times* bestselling author, stand-up comedian, writer, actress, and producer Phoebe Robinson to form Tiny Reparations Books, a highly curated imprint dedicated to publishing both literary fiction and nonfiction as well as essay collections

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## More Praise for *WHAT THE FIREFLIES KNEW* by Kai Harris

“Harris’s story helped me remember what it was like to be a young Black girl on the border of adolescence.”

—*The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

“Kai Harris’s debut novel is a stirring story of a transformative summer for a Black girl growing up in 1990s Michigan. . . This elegant and eloquent novel is perfect for readers who loved Sue Monk Kidd’s *The Secret Life of Bees* and Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*.”

—*BookPage* (starred)

"A story of Black girlhood from a promising new voice in fiction." —*Kirkus Reviews*

"**WHAT THE FIREFLIES KNEW** is a fabulous debut and truly a gem of a novel, full of the beauty, tenderness, and poignancy of Black girlhood." —**Deesha Philyaw**, author of *The Secret Lives of Church Ladies*

“Combining complex characters, writing that instantly penetrates your heart, and the restorative power of nature, *What the Fireflies Knew* is a luminous reminder that sometimes the only true path to healing is through facing our painful histories, and that we don’t have to do it alone. With a debut novel this remarkable, Kai Harris is a writer I hope is around for a long, long time.”—**Mateo Askaripour**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Black Buck*

“**WHAT THE FIREFLIES KNEW** is sharp and graceful, poignant in its depiction of a family learning to acknowledge what’s been broken in order to piece itself back together. Kai Harris beautifully captures what it feels like to be out of place—in a city, in a body, in a family, in the turmoil of adolescence—and then just as gracefully reminds us what it can feel like to find your way back to yourself in spite of everything. This book introduces a bold and necessary new writer, generous in her capacity for holding onto hope without erasing trauma.”

—**Danielle Evans**, author of *The Office of Historical Corrections* and *Before You Suffocate Your Own Fool Self*

"In this gorgeous and poignant novel, Kai Harris writes a stunningly crafted tale that explores the beauty and hard truths of life, loss, and survival through the lens of an unforgettable narrator. This story of a young black girl navigating the labyrinth of self and family secrets is told in an authentic voice, filled with well observed details and elegant prose.

Harris's first novel showcases her gift as a superb storyteller."

—**Nicole Dennis-Benn**, bestselling author of *Patsy* and *Here Comes the Sun*

“Kai Harris's fierce, lyrical writing drew me in from the first page. KB is an unforgettable narrator whose voice comes vibrantly to life through her journey from childhood to adulthood, even as she grapples with the forces that tear families apart and the power that holds them together. This is an extraordinary, powerful debut, and I hope there will be more to come from Harris.”

—**Abi Daré**, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Girl with the Louding Voice*