



## The EarthStar Solution: A Climate Fiction Mystery

**Arlene L. Williams**

Arlene Williams Books

(305pp)

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*In the rich and imaginative novel The EarthStar Solution, a wealthy teenager uncovers a plot against the planet.*

In Arlene L. Williams's immersive novel *The EarthStar Solution*, a wealthy teenager unravels a family conspiracy.

Seventeen-year-old Kaye's life is uprooted when her climate-change-denying father, Paul, moves the family to a new mansion. Overwhelmed by the recent, unexplained suicide of her brother, the loss of her mother ten years before, and the steady degradation of her relationship with her father and stepmother, Kaye resolves to spend a lonely summer working on photography projects. However, when she overhears menacing comments at a housewarming party, she becomes alert to her stoic father's sinister goings-on.

What begins as a casual investigation into her father's oil and gas business expands when Kaye uncovers a shadowy conspiracy that stretches across space and time. A strange voice emanates from her laptop, predicting environmental catastrophes before they come to pass. And an assortment of new friends rally to Kaye's side, even as Kaye finds uncanny secrets in the bowels of her new mansion. Plunging into her brother's unfinished scientific studies, her father's shady business dealings, and a staggering moral dilemma, Kaye takes on responsibility for some small part of humanity's fate.

Kaye is a nuanced and charismatic heroine. Her curiosity leads to the sympathetic handling of environmental politics and moral dilemmas. She evolves from a climate-change skeptic into someone who is passionate about the future of the planet—not only because of her encounter with Fremont, a handsome young activist who makes her self-conscious about the beliefs she was raised to hold. And the ghost of Kaye's creative, loving, deceased mother is a glowing presence in the story, which is speckled with her whimsical neologisms: the sun is called *earthstar*, clouds are *angel-mist*, and spoons are *yummy-dippers*. But the novel's secondary cast is not as fast to command attention. Many people are introduced in flat terms and appear dimensionless at first, though they grow and change later. Still, subtle emotional bonds are formed as the book continues.

Narrated with an engaging, syncopated rhythm, the novel swivels between Kaye's inner life and teenage aspirations and her father's conspiracy to harness impending climate catastrophe for financial gain. Its ecological message is enforced as much by the humanity of its cast as it is by its plot points. Through them—including people like Joe, a kind mechanic—elements of modern capitalism and inequality are examined in direct, if often familiar, terms. Kaye's family fortune also leads to discussions of wealth, anxiety, and the disconnect between financial success and personal happiness: "I have more than I could ever need but not what I want: goodnight wishes, arms to hugs me, the smile of a best friend." However, the book's sprawl does strain credulity in places.

In the rich and imaginative novel *The EarthStar Solution*, a teenager navigates tragedy, enlightenment, and deep emotional connections in the process of uncovering a plot against the planet.

WILLEM MARX (August 15, 2023)

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