



The Rain Artist

Claire Rudy Foster

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In Claire Rudy Foster's speculative novel *The Rain Artist*, a celebrated umbrella artist goes on the run after being framed for the murder of the planet's wealthiest man.

In a too-believable future, the planet has lost most of its water. The Weiss dynasty controls the means of producing rain but limits access to the elite. Celine is the last umbrella maker and is coveted for her art when ultra-rich have rain parties to flaunt their endless wealth. When Robert Weiss is murdered, the mastermind frames Celine. With the omnipresent news, police, and the Weiss family searching for her, Celine flees New York City and encounters grotesque horrors.

Celine's only recourse is to deliver Robert's body to the massive family complex that spans most of the country. Along with a convicted murder and a pregnant office worker, Celine endures a harrowing journey through the literal underbelly of society. In the tunnels running under the country, a gruesome new civilization blossoms.

From covering the lavish rain parties to the hectic underworld, the prose is deliberate. Its rhythm is engaging, too, pulling the story along even through the unsettling moments. The worldbuilding is extrapolated from modern social issues, including women's rights, wealth inequality, and climate change; it's a bleak window into an uncomfortable potential future. Every element of life has a price, and those who can't pay sink to the bottom and fade away. The only thing keeping Celine on the run is the promise of a massive glacier—something more valuable than money but just as unattainable. The sinister capitalist overtones foreshadow the brusque conclusion that suggests the book will be part of a continuing series.

Strong social commentary overlays the grim dystopian novel *The Rain Artist*, in which creativity and humanity are at risk of excision.

JOHN M. MURRAY (January / February 2024)

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