



Rain Village

Carolyn Turgeon

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Young Tessa is a diminutive girl, far too small for farm work and the object of ridicule by both her own family and the other children in their isolated Midwestern community. Her father seems to believe in nothing beyond his crops, certainly not education for his misfit daughter. When a mysterious, entrancing librarian comes to town, full of fabulous stories, earthy wisdom and potions for the lovelorn, she takes Tessa under her wing, teaching her to read and to believe in herself—and a whole new magical world of possibilities opens up. But even as she blooms, Tessa's father begins sexually abusing her. And her mentor carries a dark secret of her own that finally causes her to drown herself. Tessa runs off, following Mary's footsteps, to join the circus as a trapeze artist, where she marries a loving man and finds a fulfilling life for herself amidst her new circus family. But she remains haunted by her past. And when a stranger from one of Mary's fabulist tales shows up, Tessa risks everything to follow him to Rain Village, where she might finally discover her mentor's tragic secret.

A brilliantly evocative debut set in the early part of the 20th century, steeped in emotional turbulence and down-to-earth wisdom, where a young woman must reconcile the inner traumas from her past and learn to live in the present in order to avoid becoming prisoner to her future. Rain Village casts a fabulous spell, pulling us into a world of mystery and possibility where love, friendship and loyalty might either destroy or set one free.

Rain Village Details

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Author : Carolyn Turgeon

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From Reader Review Rain Village for online ebook

Michelle says

There is a hazy quality to Rain Village that disguises the harsher aspects of Tessa's world. Everything from her familial relationships to her time at the circus is impressionistic. Readers get the idea of what happens without having to deal with exacting details. It is very much a coping mechanism for Tessa that spills over into the rest of the novel, one that causes the novel to be more picturesque than it really should be given everything that happens to her over the course of her childhood. Still, the dream-like quality of the narrative works well given the larger-than-life personality of Mary and the fantastic aspects of the circus. There is poetry to the prose that beautifies the imagery and events, making this coming-of-age story even more special.

Tessa is an amazing girl. While the psychological damage done to her by the verbal and physical abuse heaped on her by her family is great indeed and an obvious aspect of her character, she does not understand what it means to give in to despair. She risks her body and her life not only to escape the pain of her childhood but also to prove to herself that she is more than her outward appearance. It is both admirable and painful to watch her tear herself to pieces, literally and figuratively, in order to heal.

The psychology behind Rain Village is intriguing. Not only does Tessa harbor scars from her past, Mary does as well. The mystery behind Mary's scars is what fuels Tessa and yet prevents her from moving on with her life. In many ways, Mary's presence in her life is just as damaging to Tessa's psyche as her father's physical and mother's verbal abuse for the simple fact that Tessa cannot let Mary rest in peace. She cannot move forward with her life as a wife and star performer because she is still stuck in the past with Mary – the one person who is most responsible for her rescue. It is an unexpected twist in what appears to be a fairly straightforward story.

Rain Village at its heart is a very simple story about a girl who overcomes adversity through her own tenacity and the guidance of an amazing and eclectic woman. Underneath its surface though lies a morass of psychological and spiritual complications that drive Tessa's determination and yet cause her growth to halt. It is a fascinating take on the nature versus nurture debate of child-rearing, but most importantly, it is a beautiful story about the power of love.

Lisa says

Book Summary

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mentor's tragic secret.

A brilliantly evocative debut set in the early part of the 20th century, steeped in emotional turbulence and down-to-earth wisdom, where a young woman must reconcile the inner traumas from her past and learn to live in the present in order to avoid becoming prisoner to her future. Rain Village casts a fabulous spell, pulling us into a world of mystery and possibility where love, friendship and loyalty might either destroy or set one free.

Britt says

The story/fairytale was beautiful and the characters equally so. There was satisfying growth in Tessa, the main character... And a grounding touch of realism through the glossy haze of fairytale drama...Plus I always love a circus story. I searched this book out because I read work by C Turgeon in a magazine, which I love...But it was dragging in places and the writing wasn't as magical as I'd hoped for, though lovely and sweet and got the point across...I guess I was just hoping for more sophisticated writing, and I give it grace as it was only her first novel. I'll definitely read her more recent work...Maybe there'll be growth there, too. Either way, keeping fairytales alive is important, and I commend her for that. I think this would be a good YA book, depending on the young adult — there are definitely some painful sexual violence issues explored here.

Serra Belan says

I found this to be a book with a great start, then it just dragged on and on. The last 40 pages I skimmed through the dialogue just to get the book over with. I just couldn't like the main character after about half way through the book. If you want a book that describes everything down to the last grain of sand, this is your book. It was just too much detail. I felt like the author was trying to drag out the number of pages in the book. The idea was there, but not a good follow through over all.

Deb says

Having enjoyed Godmother, I wanted to give this one a try. Tessa is tiny and unhappy until she meets the bewitching librarian, Mary. With Mary as her employer, teacher, and friend things do improve a bit, especially when she is introduced to the trapeze and the idea of life in the circus. The story does ramble...

Kiana Cook says

I loved this book. It manages to be grounded in reality and fantasy all at once and the entire story is shrouded in mystery and dreaminess. Tessa takes readers on a journey from Oakley, Kansas and its magical library to the glittering circus and Mexico City and finally to the legendary, titular Rain Village, all in her quest to find herself, heal from the trauma of her past, and make peace with what happened to her mentor, librarian Mary Finn, so many years ago.

The plot is rather simple for the length of the book and I would argue that at times, the story drags and is a little too repetitive. But that's ultimately forgivable because Tessa's travels are so entrancing and Carolyn Turgeon's language and world are so magical. This is a character-driven story, and that's the kind of story I liked best. Tessa goes through a horrific childhood, but finds a way to blossom under Mary's guidance, and despite losing the woman who mattered most to her, finds a way to take her life into her own hands and chase her dreams. Tessa's road to recovery is inspiring and a beautiful message to readers regarding abuse and overcoming your past.

Turgeon also gives us a very in-depth look at grief and what it means to lose somebody who meant the world to you. Despite Mary only being in the first portion of the book, her presence is palpable in every page because Tessa carries her memory with her at all times. Though the "Rain Village" portion of the novel (where Tessa goes to Mary's hometown to understand her childhood and what made her the way she was) is a little tiresome with the constant repetitions of "I need to know why", the final pages are incredibly powerful regarding letting go and accepting how much we'll never really know about a person and how they'll live on in our memory regardless. Turgeon blew me away with her treatment of Tessa and Mary's relationship and its legacy in Tessa's memory--every moment and realization is quiet, but undeniably wise and emotionally affecting.

You will be swept away by this book and its characters and its rich, fantastical world. I'm sad that I've finally read all of Carolyn Turgeon's books now--her stories, characters, and settings are so vivid and unforgettable. I would recommend *Rain Village* to anybody who wants a different kind of story, is unafraid of emotional trauma and pain, and wants a nice blend of fantasy, realism, and mystery. 4 stars.

(And I don't normally care much about covers, but I have to give a shout-out to this one. It's gorgeous.)

Louise says

Little Tessa Riley is a tiny, diminutive twelve-year-old girl who barely stands four feet tall. She was born with hands the size of small plums and fingers like star fish. She is far too small to help on the family farm harvesting corn and potatoes. Tessa can't even hold one large potato with both hands. Her mother, father, sister, and two brothers, all think she is a freak. They call her mean and hurtful names like: munchkin, tramp, and black-haired Jezebel. Her mother forces her to hang from a curtain rod for hours on end hoping it will stretch her little body so she'll be less of a freak.

Her father is a loud, gigantic man who likes to Lord his power over those who are weaker than he is. Her meek mother runs around clutching rosary beads but isn't even Catholic, and is bent over the table reading her Bible every night.

Tessa had heard there was a new librarian in town who seemed to have a strange affect on the men, her own father included. After lunch one day, Tessa decided to get down from her "stretching rod" and run her way to town in hopes of seeing this woman without getting caught by her father.

Sitting on the front steps of the Oakley, Kansas City library, Tessa was trying to decide whether she should go inside or not. She looked up and there was the most beautiful woman she had ever seen and the woman was looking right at her! The woman had striking blue eyes, brown freckled skin and long, wavy, shiny black hair. Mary Finn, the librarian, turned her cat like eyes on Tessa and invited her into the library with her. Tessa was thrilled. Once inside, Tessa thought Mary smelled of: "...the spices my mother baked oranges in."

Her wrists were adorned with jingly bracelets and she wore a long flowing skirt.

Mary chatted with Tessa for a bit and Tessa was so endeared to her that she ended up spilling her guts about her terrible home life and body stretching to Mary. Mary felt so sad for little Tessa and made her a special blend of her tea and promised to teach her to read and write. Before she left that day, Mary had taught Tessa how to spell her name. Tessa watched various women from town come in disguised to talk to Mary secretly about their problems, they believed she was a witch with magic powers. Mary would read Tarot cards and send them home with a small cloth bag filled with special herbs and spices to help with their particular problems. When Tessa left that day to return home, Mary was worried what Tessa's father would do if he knew where his daughter had been.

The following day, Mary told Tessa that she used to be part of a circus which made Tessa's eyes go wide. She was part of the "Velasquez Circus" from Mexico, and they were famous. This new news only endeared Tessa even more to Mary, especially when she learned that Mary flew on the trapeze!

That evening in bed Tessa was bursting at the seams just dying to share this new knowledge with someone. As she lay in her bed she decided to confide in her sister, Geraldine, after making her promise that she wouldn't tell anyone. Geraldine was totally excited as she knew who the Velasquez Circus was because they had come to Kansas City the previous year. Geraldine told Tessa that she thought Mary looked like a princess. Tessa replied that she did too, and wanted to be just like her! Geraldine began a cruel laugh, a horrible guffaw, telling Tessa that she could never look like Mary Finn because she was far too ugly and a freak. Feelings of shame enveloped little Tessa and she hid under her bed covers for the rest of the night listening to Geraldine still snorting in laughter.

Mary and Tessa became fast friends well into Tessa's teen years. Mary finally hired Tessa to work in the library with her. They shared joys, sorrows, and secrets until a terrible tragedy occurred changing the course of Tessa's life forever as she runs off to join the circus!

You won't believe what happens to little Tessa from Oakley, Kansas once she finds the circus. This story is simply a masterpiece.

Bookworm AA says

I love Carolyn Turgeon's books, and this one was no exception. I loved the book and fell asleep twice last night trying to finish it! I started this book right before the school year started and had almost no time to read, so it took me forever to get through it, but I tried to read it every chance I got. I think my only problems with this book are:

1) It drags for awhile. Yes, the book was interesting and I thoroughly enjoyed it all the way through, but the big thing about the mysterious man coming and taking her to Rain Village to uncover Mary's secrets didn't happen until the last three chapters. It was made out to be kind of a big deal in the description, but is very short and at the very end.

2) What EXACTLY happened between Mary and William at the river that day? What about the opal ring? Was Mary the peasant girl? Is that why she killed William? Was being bound to him forever the reason why she ended up drowning too? I might just be slow at catching on to this, although I'm not normally, but it

doesn't seem to be explained. It's still pretty vague. Is that the point? So many questions left unanswered.

Other than those two things, I absolutely loved the book! My next Carolyn Turgeon book to read is Godmother: The Secret Cinderella Story, and I can't wait!

Saleh MoonWalker says

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Bookworm says

I adore Carolyn Turgeon's work. I remembered the first time I picked up Mermaid at Barnes and Nobles. It was as if it had been waiting for me to walk home with it. I knew I had to read Rain Village someday and I finally snagged a copy of it online!

This book is... hmm... peculiar. The plot is shrouded in mystery and even till the end you don't know what truly happened to Mary when she was in Rain Village, and why she took her own life in Oakley. The narration is simple to read but often heavy to absorb. The main character, Tessa seems to be floating through life's challenges and is somewhat obsessive over her mentor, to the point where she leaves her happy life in the circus in search of answers. This book made me think a lot of how a person's life can be ruined by abuse and death of a loved one. I feel horrible for Tessa to have to endure such hardships. Reading page after page was like being imprisoned by her repetitive, obsessive, depressing thoughts.

My favourite part was the time she spent proving her worth in the Velasquez Circus where she met the famous Lollie and her glamorous brothers. My least favourite has got to be from the point where she left for Rain Village with Costas, leaving Mauro behind. I was thinking, this trip better be worth it, but it wasn't.... not to me at least. In my opinion, the whole Costas and Isabel part didn't add any value to the plot. The positive ending seemed a tad rushed. After spending years wanting to find out Mary's history, it didn't seem like Tessa to find closure just by visiting Isabel and the pond where William had died. I was also hoping for more background of the elusive William and Mary.

This is a dreamy, melancholic tale studded with Carolyn's lilting and contemplative language. A beautiful book. I'm looking forward to read Fairest Of Them All.

Caitlin says

More of a 2.5. The novel started out strong but became repetitive as it went along. Some passages seemed to be copied and pasted from earlier parts of the book to later parts. I'm not sure I understand what the point of Tessa's journey was, especially since the novel ends on such an unfinished note.

Courtney says

I had to quit reading this book because it got evermore disturbing as I read. There are just some things I don't like to read about and incest is one of them. Call me crazy.

Initially, it had a good plot... could have been quite interesting, but Mary starts getting really slutty, really fast and the main character's story is just SAD.

Another book that could have been, but isn't.

Erin Stuhlsatz says

As far as circus books go, I liked the Phryne Fisher one much more. Tessa didn't really speak to me.

Amanda says

Tessa Riley is a young girl growing up on her family's farm in Oakley, Kansas. She has a brother, sister, and parents. But she's no ordinary girl. She's only four feet tall. She is relentlessly teased by the community because of her height. Her family are very straight laced farmers who's sole concern is maintaining the farm...to the extent that the children are discouraged from learning (they can't even read) to work on the farm. Tessa is too small for most farm work so she is told to hang from a curtain rod to try and stretch herself so she gets bigger. Her mom is distant and unloving and her father is abusive.

Enter the glamorous new town librarian, Mary. (First time I've hear that in a book.) Mary takes Tessa under her wing, teaches her to read, lets her work in the library, tells her wonderful stories, and opens the world up for Tessa. Mary also used to be a star in the circus before she left under mysterious circumstances. So when tragedy strikes, Tessa takes off to find the circus, become a star herself, and start a new life.

I loved it. It's one of those books where the characters really stick with you. Tiny Tessa is just an interesting character. She's such a small person with huge dreams. And Mary is this glamorous lovable character. I also loved that the story is pretty timeless. It could have happened anytime between the turn of the 20th Century and now. I'm assuming it takes place sometime during the 1920s-1930s. It's one of those great bittersweet stories.

I do see how Carolyn is evolving as a writer though. While great writing the beginning and end could be a tad bit shorter. If you aren't feeling the story, keep with it until she leaves to join the circus. I just loved watching her character evolve and grow.

Lori says

Have been trying to read this for several months, as in started it in December, and it became a mission for me to finish. Enjoyed the circus life descriptions and found the plot intriguing. Appreciated that main character

Tessa was naive, but just couldn't like her. Writing was mostly trite and very redundant - same sentences over and over again without advancing the story. Story dragged but then ended with a lot of pieces unexplained (motivation; unfinished characters) a bit confusing since so much (too much?) detail used in previous story points. Really wanted to like this more than I did.
