



## Drizzle

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Eleven-year-old Polly Peabody knows her family's world-famous rhubarb farm is magical. The plants taste like chocolate, jewels appear in the soil, bugs talk to her, and her best friend is a rhubarb plant named Harry. But the most magical thing is that every single Monday, at exactly 1:00, it rains. Until the Monday when the rain just stops. Now it's up to Polly to figure out why, and whether her brother's mysterious illness and her glamorous aunt Edith's sudden desire to sell the farm have anything to do with it. Most of all, Polly has to make it start raining again before it's too late. Her brother's life, the plants' survival, and her family's future all depend on it. Kathleen Van Cleve has woven an unforgettable coming-of-age tale with all the heart and wonder of a Roald Dahl novel.

## Drizzle Details

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Author : Kathleen Van Cleve

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## From Reader Review Drizzle for online ebook

### Pumpkinbear says

My seven-year-old recommended this book to me, and as a testament to her maturing taste in literature (as well as her knowledge of her mother!), I LOVED it. In the genre of magical realism, which is a great genre for children's literature, especially, because it helps us remember how much of the world still IS magical for them, even the scientific stuff, Polly Peabody lives on a magical farm, the best place in the world, exactly the place that you'd want to live if you were a kid, the most perfect, fantastic, home you could ever imagine.

Until it isn't. Sure, a few years back Polly's doting grandmother died, and that was a terrible loss, but then her aunt moved back home, giving up her high-powered career path, and, if anything, she dotes on Polly even more than her grandmother did. Polly still mourns her grandmother, of course, but she models a healthy grief. What's happening now is scarier, in that it's affecting the magical place that Polly calls home. The magical, regular rain that keeps the magical plants healthy and thriving just ceases, subjecting the Peabody farm to the same drought conditions that plague the rest of the midwest. The magical plants seem to be revolting, and Polly, who can somewhat speak to them, doesn't understand what they're trying to tell her. Polly's 17-year-old brother is growing ill. And scariest of all, Polly's doting aunt suddenly announces that she wants to sell this beloved farm so that she can get rich, go back to her great career, and force Polly to get out into the wider world.

What follows is Polly's journey to solve the mystery of the rain, to solve the mystery of her brother's illness, to solve the mystery of her aunt's changed affections and her cruel intentions, and to solve the more mundane, but no less important mysteries of how to get along with her schoolmates and deal with a bully. She struggles so hard with no adults to help her, and when she finally prevails, you can't help but be so proud of her.

As well as an homage to the beauty of rural life, Drizzle is, at heart, a morality tale for the modern feminist. Polly's grandmother was the matriarch of the farm, a decided housewife in a rural landscape, who, we learn, attempted in vain to make Polly's aunt be the same type of woman, and refused to accept her differences. Polly's aunt had to work extremely hard in the world to become the leader that she is, removing herself from her disapproving family, struggling alone over all the usual obstacles, and is so clearly happy and finally content in her success that she is also attempting (in vain) to make Polly be the same type of woman. Her efforts are manipulative and underhanded, endanger lives, and show that she doesn't understand this child that she claims to love any better than her own mother apparently understood her.

Polly, however, is the culmination of feminism, in that she understands both sides. She's been raised, you see, by both her housewife grandmother and her career-minded aunt, and she's empowered enough to clearly see that her choices are absolutely her own. She refuses to acknowledge the compartments that make women feel compartmentalized if they choose home or career, or make them feel torn if they choose both. Polly simply chooses what she wants to do, and is empowered to work to achieve whatever that desire is. Yes, her choice is life on her magical farm, for now, but for Polly it remains a conscious choice, not a definition.

My one disappointment with this otherwise wonderful book is its secondary emphasis on secrecy. The legacy that allows Polly to eventually save her farm is a deep family secret, known only to one woman in a generation. This means that when her aunt, the secret-holder, begins to work purposefully AGAINST the farm, no one knows what is going on, or why, or how to fix it. Polly must first struggle to learn that there is a secret, then must struggle to learn all the various components of the secret, then must struggle to learn the

powers that she holds, as the chosen one of her generation. Surprisingly, in a child who has so far been notable in NOT accepting the given knowledge of her family, she simply accepts at the end of the book that she, too, must keep everything that she has learned a secret, preserving the mystery, keeping her entire family in the dark about the true workings of the farm, and continuing to do her own important work completely alone. This is a terrible blow at the end of the book, because this DOES compartmentalize Polly onto a very narrow path. If she can't share the secret, she can't share the labor, and the labor MUST be done to ensure the health of the farm. Polly can't go to college at this rate. Heck, she can't even go on vacation or it won't rain! Not only is this development troubling in that, in my personal opinion, it is unethical to present a conclusion in which a child chooses to keep a major secret from a loving family, but it also serves to eliminate the powerful feminist choices that Polly could have made. People should cooperate with each other, help each other. If Polly's aunt hadn't had to keep the secret, she could have taught Polly her powers long ago--she could have gone back to work! If Polly and her aunt weren't now estranged, the aunt could help Polly in the future--Polly could go to college! If Polly could share her secret with her very loving family, they could help her with much of the infrastructure surrounding her duties--she's a child, after all, and has to do schoolwork! It was a deep disappointment, after reading this wonderful book and getting to discuss the power of Polly's choices and her work with my daughter, to also have to discuss with her the importance of not keeping secrets from her family. Together, my daughter and I spun an epilogue, in which Polly realizes this crucial fact, shares with her family, gives her aunt the opportunity to reconcile with her, and then proceeds to live the powerful life that she is capable of, without any silly authoritative boundaries.

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### **C.J. Milbrandt says**

Polly Peabody's family lives on what can only be called a magical farm. Their house is a castle. Nobody can drown in their lake. The insects are surprisingly intelligent. And it rains every Monday at 1:00 p.m., without fail. Which does wonders for their rhubarb crops. But events conspire, and it looks as if they might lose the farm.

Rhubarb and emerald rings. School bullies and best friends. Dragon flies and dark towers. Sabotage and saving the farm. Absolutely fun, uplifting without being overly sweet. Deals practically with so many monumental things: mean girls, phobias, grief, regrets, resilience, future plans, and pulling together as a family in the face of losing what's most precious.

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### **Tasha says**

Polly Peabody knows that her family's rhubarb farm is something special, even something magical! They grow Giant Rhubarb that is helping close the hole in the ozone and chocolate rhubarb that tastes like a sweet but is a vegetable. They have a lake that you can't drown in no matter how long you hold your breath, a castle to live in, and gems sprout from the ground. And every Monday at 1:00 pm exactly, it rains. But then one Monday it doesn't. And other things start to go wrong on the farm. The rhubarb begins to wilt even though it is being watered by hand. The umbrella ride fails when people are riding it. A strange fog is starting to cover some of the farm. It is up to Polly to find out what is causing the damage and save their farm. To do that she will have to face her fears, uncover family secrets and trust in the magic of the farm.

This enticing tale is a pleasure to read. Van Cleve has created the farm of childhood dreams filled with dessert that is healthful, carnival rides, friendly bugs, animated plants, and much more. She writes with a

light friendly tone that never gets bogged down in elaborate descriptions or overwriting, which is a fear with books of this sort. Instead, she allows the magic to shine and the imagination to soar.

Polly is a great protagonist who is painfully shy, bullied at school, and yet one of the most fascinating people you could meet. As she learns that she is much braver and more skilled than she ever dreamed, Polly begins to let others into her world and make friends. Yet it is not that simple, and her struggles with self-reliance, family secrets, and friendships make for great coming-of-age story material.

A large part of the book's appeal is the tension between the magical and the mundane. Polly has to face school and all of its pitfalls as well as the desperate situation of her home and family farm. While magic is involved, it actually makes Polly's personal life outside of the farm more difficult. The tension of classmates, news reporters, and magic make this book very special.

Highly recommended, this book is perfection for fans of *Savvy* by Ingrid Law. It would make a wonderful classroom read and will be happily devoured by children who enjoy a lot of chocolate with their rhubarb. Appropriate for ages 9-12.

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### **Monica Edinger says**

Enjoyed this. Liked the premise very much as it had a fresh, original feel to it.

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### **Mindy says**

Drizzle was a very interesting book. It was about an eleven year old girl named Polly Peabody. She lives on a 'magical' farm. It rains every Monday at 1:00pm. But when that stops, her Brother, Freddy, gets very sick, and her Aunt Edith tries to sell the farm. Polly believes that she can do something about that. She believes that she could somehow make it rain again. When things get tough Polly knows that she will need to do something. After Freddy goes into a coma, everybody worries. So she will need to face her fears in order to save him. She will need to go into the Dark House to find the secret to making it rain! (in her case, Drizzle!)

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### **Mary says**

Finally, a heroine I can identify with. She's afraid of bugs and afraid of the dark. And she believes in magic. Real magic -- not the kind where you take a quarter from behind someone's ear. She talks to plants == and they talk back. She lives on a rhubarb farm, but not just any ordinary rhubarb farm. They grow chocolate rhubarb, a vegetable that tastes better than a Snickers bar. But the farm is in trouble. You see, every Monday (except one) for 86 years it has rained at 1 pm on Monday. The one Monday it didn't rain was when Polly's older brother Freddy was born. And now the rain has stopped. The plants are dying and Freddy is really sick. It is up to Polly to figure out how to save her family's farm and her brother's life.

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### **Volleygirl112 says**

I luuuuv this book it gas such creativity and I love the big giant umbrella swing and the diamonds in the dirt :)

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### **Handd51 says**

This book tried hard to be great, but didn't measure up. It reminds me of Savvy, but more forced. The idea of vegetables that taste like chocolate is a little much, and the rest of the story is about as far fetched. The characters are also a bit odd - the genetic magical mutation is interesting, but it's manifestation is not as successful as Harry Potter's scar. Also the mix between science and magic just didn't work.

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### **Kylie says**

Imagine having a farm that grew plants that taste like chocolate ,and u are still eating healthy. Everyday is a adventure for Polly Peabody on Rupert's World Famous Rhubarb Farm. Polly knows that their farm is rather unusual after her Grandmother died and all around her diamonds sprout from the ground ,and on every Monday it rains at 1:00. When it rains the hole farm is swarmed with tourist that want the ride the giant red umbrella. But then one day the rain stopped ,Polly's hole world falls apart. Her older brother Freddy comes down with a severe illness ,and her family could lose the farm. Polly must uncover many secrets to help her brother survive. She must be quick on her feet to uncover the secrets in time.

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### **Robert Kent says**

Okay. So usually this is the part of the review where I tell you what the book is about, except I'm not sure how to succinctly summarize Drizzle. It is, and I mean this in the best possible way, unlike any other book I've ever read. That was what attracted me to it. The truth is, I can't even really tell you that much about it without spoiling the whole thing, and I don't want to do that. Mrs. Van Cleve has crafted a work of stunning originality and you owe it to yourself to put Drizzle on your reading list.

Welcome to Rupert's world famous rhubarb farm. It is a place different from any you've ever encountered . Mrs. Van Cleve never specifies that Oompa Loompas don't work there and I prefer to imagine they do. The rhubarb grown at Rupert's farm tastes like chocolate, but it's still a vegetable so your parents can't get mad. Some of the rhubarb is grown for medicinal purposes and shows tremendous promise as a cure for cancer among other ailments. And there's giant rhubarb that's really helping out with the hole in the ozone layer.

But I haven't even told you the most interesting parts! If Hogwarts were a farm, it would be Rupert's Rhubarb Farm. It's a popular tourist destination, and it isn't hard to see why. There's a full scale version of the White House on the premises, and if that doesn't do it for you, check out their castle. There's also a certain Dark House that may or may not be haunted. And there's a giant "peace" maze to wonder through and an umbrella ride. It rains every Monday at 1:00pm, except the one Monday it doesn't. Oh, and get this, there's a lake in which no one can drown. One boy managed to stay underwater an entire hour and was just fine.

All of these fantastic revelations about the farm take some telling and it is worth noting that the main conflict of the novel isn't really introduced until page 75, which is practically waiting until the sequel as far as the pacing in middle grade novels goes. And that's the thing that really got me jazzed about Drizzle. Kathleen Van Cleve brazenly breaks all the rules and displays uncommon courage for a middle grade writer and she pulls off everything. Her book, were it in the hands of a lesser writer, often flirts with disaster, but Van Cleve's got the chops to make it rain, as it were.

For starters, Drizzle is 358 pages, which puts it in YA range according to many standards, but the main character is eleven and the book is recommended for grades 4-6, clearly upper middle grade or tween range. I won't pretend to understand how Van Cleve pulled off all of her tricks, but as for how she got away with delaying until page 75 to introduce the main plot when so many of us labor to work it in by page 5, that I get. Now to be fair, she does foreshadow the main plot and she opens the novel with this scene:

But then, on one rainy Monday afternoon, the twentieth of September, I found her, lying faceup, in between the P and E of the PEACE maze. The toes of her silly slippers pointed up to the gray sky as rain washed over her cheeks. I turned to see that all around us the rhubarb plants swished their wide green leaves over their heads, pointing to her body. The lake began to roar as if there were a windstorm, even though there wasn't. I turned back to Grandmom and begged.

Please wake up, please wake up.

See what I mean? Fearless! And the first line of the novel is "The mist is back." So there is a hook and the reader is carefully drawn into world of the story. But otherwise, Van Cleve spends 75 pages introducing us to Rupert's Rhubarb farm and the mysterious nature of the place is so compelling you won't even notice the main plot, though hinted at, hasn't started. She uses the time to introduce characters, all of them memorable, and themes she'll spend the novel discussing, one of the central ones being science versus mysticism—fascinating stuff for a middle grade novel or any novel.

Our heroine is plucky contrarian Polly Peabody, an eleven-year-old after my own heart; after everyone's heart. You're going to love her. She's shy sometimes, arrogant at others, a genuine hero, and readers will definitely identify with her. I want to talk about her most controversial action in a moment, but that means I'm going to enter spoiler territory, so I'll go ahead and finish the review first. Drizzle is a great book and you don't want to miss it. It's funny and an all around good time, but there's plenty of substance as well. Go order your copy, read it, and then come back for the rest of this blog post in which I spoil something major and discuss Van Cleve's prose style.

Those of you still reading, I warned you. There is an element in Drizzle a little like a standard Disney cartoon. There are dragonflies and rhubarb plants that communicate with Polly through body language and they are her friends the way Ariel has that singing crab, or Belle has that talking candlestick. One rhubarb plant in particular, Harry, is Polly's best friend. Harry is no throw away character. He is a genuine best friend to Polly. She shares her secrets with him and they have a true relationship. She even introduces him to other characters. He's a rhubarb plant, but he's personified and is a character in the story.

I have long been of the opinion that it takes far more courage to be controversial when writing for children than when writing for adults. Kids are much tougher than adults often give them credit for, but don't tell that to some parents or teachers. For crying out loud, people in this country protested Harry Potter. In the adult fiction world, one has to write American Psycho to generate controversy, but write one gay character into a

popular children's book and national headlines are made.

When at last the main plot is introduced—the farm is up for sale and the plant life is revolting—Polly becomes very upset. She goes to her friend Harry for answers and believes he has betrayed her. So... she shreds him. I'm not talking like hurts him a little. No. She rips him limb to limb until he is murdered and there is no Harry left. She feels very guilty afterwards and her remorse is a major motivation later. And this is a magic farm in which no one ever drowns, so there's at least a chance Harry the chocolate rhubarb might be brought back to life.

Still, this is an event that will divide readers, I think. Not kids. Kids will be fine with it. But it may upset some parents to read a book in which the eleven-year-old protagonist commits such a violent act. And it is brutal. As I think you can surmise from the "finding Grandmom's body" scene I reproduced earlier, Van Cleve isn't handling the reader with kid gloves. She doesn't condescend, nor does she revel in being intentionally nasty. She simply tells the story in the most effective way possible.

I, for one, loved the scene in which Polly shredded Harry. I laughed and laughed, partly because I was so shocked, and partly because I have always prayed for a children's story in which one of those annoying cutesie wootsie sidekicks is horribly mangled. More though, I truly admire the courage of Van Cleve's convictions. She didn't truckle. She told the story she wanted the way she wanted, something we don't get to see nearly enough of. And more, the scene works. It flushes out some of the most interesting aspects of Polly and it is integral to the plot. But it will offend the delicate sensibilities of some adults, I'm sure.

Okay. I see that this review is too long, so I'll stop here. Except I really want to praise Kathleen Van Cleve's writing style. Her prose is funny and often lyrical, while clear and effective. There are many passages I highlighted and would like to reproduce here, but what struck me most is her use of white space. The book is 358 pages, it's true, but it doesn't feel like it. This is because of frequent paragraphing and use of white space. The pages fly by and I bet young readers are thrilled by how quickly they're able to read a big book. I'm going to leave you with this passage that I think really best illustrates how Van Cleve uses white space to increase suspense and the pace. It, of course, can be found on page 75:

We both turn to the Umbrella at the same time.

People are screaming. Screaming.

I don't understand at first. But I look closer and see the people on the individual swings spinning around, out of control—I hear the clickclickclick of the rising Umbrella shaft, relentless, unstopping.

I'm close enough that I can see Chico waving his hands like a banshee behind the controls.

I look up to the Umbrella again, just as the platform seems to slip just a little and the screams become even more awful.

The Umbrella.

It's stuck.

Visit me at [WWW.MIDDLEGRADENINJA.BLOGSPOT.COM](http://WWW.MIDDLEGRADENINJA.BLOGSPOT.COM) to read an interview with the author, as well as other writer interviews and book reviews.

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### **Susan Dunn says**

I read this on Jill's recommendation after liking *A Tangle of Knots* so much. This was one good too, but not quite as wonderful. Polly and her family live on a magical farm where it rains every Monday at exactly 1:00. The farm thrives under the rain - especially the chocolate rhubarb (which is rhubarb that tastes just like chocolate - can't someone invent this?!). The farm is famous, and tourists make it a frequent stop on their travels. But one Monday the rain just stops, and doesn't come back. No one knows why and no one can make it start again - and in the meantime the plants are dying. Can Polly figure out the mystery and make it rain again before it's too late?

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### **Sarah says**

Clever premise for a book but I did not finish this. I am so bothered by continuity errors, poor grammar and poor editing that I have lost faith in the storyteller.

p.15 - I shove my hands in my pockets and push my hair back, off my face.

p.54-55 - Freddy removes his sweaty shirt and tosses it to Basford to wash. On the next page (same conversation) Freddy denies he has a fever and pulls his shirt away from his hot skin.

p.71 - "For once I didn't run to Freddy's room last night, though." Does it really make sense to have 'for once' and 'last night' in the same sentence?

p.91 - This morning when I **come** down for breakfast, Beatrice **showed** me the front page of the local newspaper.

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### **BookKids says**

In *Drizzle*, narrator Polly Peabody lives on a magical rhubarb farm where it rains every Monday at 1 PM exactly. The rest of the area is in the dry Midwest, but the Peabodys always have rain. Until one day they don't.

And that's just the beginning of their problems.

Without the rain, the rhubarb begins to die. Polly's brother Freddy gets ill. And now Aunt Edith wants to sell the farm. If the rain does not return, then the Peabodys might not have a choice.

Polly is determined to save the farm, but is there anything an 11 year old girl can do?

This book is perfect for the people who loved *Savvy* and have been looking for something similar. It has the same kind of feel to the book and style of writing. Both books have a magical component to them although the magic is not as prominent in this book as it is in *Savvy*. Also in both books, the main character really has to discover who she truly is and not rely on her preconceived notions of herself.

However, Drizzle is certainly its own novel. The magic and plot and setting of the novel are distinctive and creative. I like the world that Van Cleve creates for Polly to live in. And despite Polly's constant tears and assertions that she's a coward, she actually is a strong female character that I think girls can identify with.

A good individual read for ages 8 & up, We here at BookPeople would recommend this as a good bedtime book for parents to read a loud to their kids aged 7-12. The book is broken up into many small sections that are the perfect size for before bed reading.

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### **Cathy says**

easy world to fall into, written with grace, charm and wit.

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### **Lola says**

I learned that even when you are young you can complete any challenge that is through at you.

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