

Bring the Rain

JoAnn Franklin

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In JoAnn Franklin's novel *Bring the Rain*, Dart Sommers has an established career as a psychology professor at a North Carolina university. She is also the founder of The Raindrop Institute, a think tank dedicated to ending poverty. Dart's mind has always served her well, like a fascinatingly individualized computer: it is responsive, acquisitive, and able to apply intelligence to her personal and professional lives.

Now that she's in her early sixties, however, Dart is beginning to notice some "episodes" regarding her mental capacity. There are issues with physical coordination, shifts in focus, erratic impulses, and even memory lapses, to the point that she cannot remember having eaten a piece of cheesecake just a few minutes earlier. Her suspicions are that she has frontotemporal dementia, or FTD. This degenerative brain disease would be a grim diagnosis for anyone, but is especially devastating for a member of the academic world.

Dart's openness and reflective wisdom make her an appealing character. She is intriguingly flawed and almost resolutely independent, with a tendency to over-analyze her emotions. Dart's romantic interest is widower Ash Wright, a dean at the university and Dart's boss. Theirs is a complicated relationship made more intense by the fact that Ash's wife died from FTD a few years earlier.

Dart's frank narrative regarding her condition carries the novel through its troubled landscape, particularly as her ability to maintain her usual self-reliance is upset by the uncertainty of her future and her need to connect with and accept help from others. There are also keen observations about the occasionally cutthroat nature of academia and regarding the often marginalized role of aging women in society.

Bring the Rain approaches an unsettling subject from a forthright perspective, but with a sense of more humanistic hope than inevitable tragedy.

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