

# DEATH OF A RAINMAKER

A DUST BOWL MYSTERY

“A portrait of Depression-era America so searingly authentic that the topsoil practically blows off each page.”  
—Louis Bayard, author of *The Pale Blue Eye*

**LAURIE LOEWENSTEIN**

AUTHOR OF *UNMENTIONABLES*

A KAYLIE JONES BOOK

Forthcoming from Kaylie Jones Books October 2, 2018

**PRESS KIT**



# DEATH OF A RAINMAKER

A DUST BOWL MYSTERY

BY LAURIE LOEWENSTEIN

A KAYLIE JONES BOOK



A classic murder mystery set in the 1930s Dust Bowl that portrays the era with great beauty, tenderness, and sorrowful authenticity.

## PRAISE FOR DEATH OF A RAINMAKER

“Laurie Loewenstein’s vivid *Death of a Rainmaker* is at once an engrossing yarn, an elegant inquiry into human desperation, and a portrait of Depression-era America so searingly authentic that the topsoil practically blows off each page.”

—**Louis Bayard**, author of *The Pale Blue Eye*

“Reading *Death of a Rainmaker* is like slipping through time right into a 1930s black-and-white movie. It’s odd for a story about a murder to be gentle and generous, but this one is. I fell in love with everyone in town--except of course those who turned out to be trouble. Laurie Loewenstein has a knack for writing the early twentieth century. I sure hope this is a series, because I’m smitten.” —**Robin Oliveira**, author of *My Name is Mary Sutter*

## ABOUT DEATH OF A RAINMAKER

When a rainmaker is bludgeoned to death in the pitch-blackness of a colossal dust storm, small-town sheriff Temple Jennings shoulders yet another burden in the hard times of the 1930s Dust Bowl. The killing only magnifies Temple’s ongoing troubles: a formidable opponent in the upcoming election, the repugnant burden of enforcing farm foreclosures, and his wife’s lingering grief over the loss of their eight-year-old son.

As the sheriff and his young deputy investigate the murder, their suspicions focus on a teenager, Carmine, serving with the Civilian Conservation Corps. The deputy, himself a former CCCer, struggles with remaining loyal to the corps while pursuing his own aspirations as a lawman.

When the investigation closes in on Carmine, Temple’s wife, Etha, quickly becomes convinced of his innocence and sets out to prove it. But Etha’s own probe soon reveals a darker web of secrets, which imperil Temple’s chances of reelection and cause the husband and wife to confront their long-standing differences about the nature of grief.

## ABOUT LAURIE LOEWENSTEIN



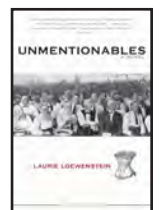
**LAURIE LOEWENSTEIN** is the author of the best-selling novel *Unmentionables*. An Ohio native, she currently lives in Columbia, Maryland.

## ALSO AVAILABLE

*Unmentionables* by Laurie Loewenstein

Trade paperback original, \$15.95, ISBN: 9781617751943

“Exceptionally readable and highly recommended.” —**Library Journal** (starred review)



**DEATH OF A RAINMAKER: A DUST BOWL MYSTERY** | by Laurie Loewenstein | Pub. Date: October 2, 2018 | 320 pages

**Fiction/Historical/Literary** | Trade Paperback, \$16.95, ISBN: 978-1-61775-665-8 | Hardcover, \$32.95, ISBN: 978-1-61775-679-5 | E-ISBN: 978-1-61775-680-1

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## CRITICAL PRAISE FOR **DEATH OF A RAINMAKER**

# KIRKUS

August 1, 2018

A small-town sheriff in 1930s Oklahoma, already dealing with the effects of the Depression and a drought, must solve the murder of a rainmaker who failed to make it rain.

Sheriff Temple Jennings and his wife, Etha, have made Vermillion, Oklahoma, home for the last 15 years, having moved west to avoid memories of the place where their young son died. Everyone in town is struggling because of the Depression, but the farmers are especially hard-hit, trying to keep crops and animals alive without rain for 240 days. Certain town leaders, among them Jennings' rival for the upcoming sheriff's election, have paid to have a rainmaker come to town in hopes of making it rain. But the day after the man's TNT blasting failed to bring a drop, he's found dead outside the local movie theater. Suspicion falls on a local Civilian Conservation Corps young man who arouses the maternal instincts of Etha. She begins her own investigation, uncovering some dark town secrets along the way. In measured and only occasionally overwritten prose, **Loewenstein (*Unmentionables*, 2014) movingly describes the events and the people, from farm eviction auctions and hobo villages to Dish Nights at the movies. She vividly brings to life a town filled with believable characters, from a young woman learning her own worth to the deputy sheriff figuring out where his loyalties lie.**

**This warm and evocative novel captures a time and place, with well-researched details shown through the lives and circumstances of one American town.**

## ADDITIONAL PRAISE FOR **DEATH OF A RAINMAKER**

“As if the black blizzards of the Dust Bowl weren’t worrisome enough for an Oklahoma sheriff and his spunky wife, in *Death of a Rainmaker* Laurie Loewenstein piles on even more troubles: a murder victim’s corpse buried in a sandstorm, an array of possible perpetrators, a small community already fractured by secrets and swirls of distrust, and a contentious election in which the sheriff’s honesty and competence are on the ballot. Like the storms themselves, the plot powers its way across the landscape and seeps into everything it encounters.”

—**Dayton Duncan**, author of *The Dust Bowl*

“During one of America’s most devastating periods, the Depression-era Dust Bowl, a huckster is murdered as a dust storm hurtles toward a small Oklahoma town. What follows is an authentic tale of the drought-stricken southern plains, and a lovingly and eloquently told murder mystery. It is not only the unfolding plot and the metaphorical obscuring of truth by dust, but Loewenstein’s masterful prose—with its tender language and skillful resonance—that will captivate readers and keep them enthralled. *Death of a Rainmaker* is both a gripping tale of murder, and a glimpse into resilience and love in a time of savage loss, scarcity, and fear.”

—**Leslie Schwartz**, author of *The Lost Chapters*

“When the wind comes sweeping down the plain in *Death of a Rainmaker*, Laurie Loewenstein takes your breath away. Her haunting and vivid prose deftly describes the opening chords of a dust storm that left families sick with dust pneumonia or dead broke. In this gripping tale of a sheriff searching for a killer in a dying town, Loewenstein rounds up characters with true grit, cunning, and kindness.”

—**Mary Kay Zuravleff**, author of *Man Alive!*

“*Death of a Rainmaker* is a jewel of a novel. The scenes and characters are so vivid and alive that you forget that the Internet and interstate roads haven’t been around forever. Loewenstein is a born storyteller who writes scholarly based page-turners. Overlaying it all is the rainmaker’s story and death. It’s a read you won’t forget.”

—**John Bowers**, author of *Love in Tennessee*

## AUTHOR'S STATEMENT

My father was a shy city boy from Cincinnati, descended from a long line of Jewish merchants and grocers. Yet the jolting rhythm of a tractor, the fleshy udder of a cow ready for milking, the grassy smell of hay inexplicably called him. In 1949, after earning a degree in agriculture, he pulled open the barn doors on his family's old summer place and dug in. For a while he made a go of it, helped along by neighboring farm families who took pity on a young bachelor farmer.

But farming is unforgiving. A stretch of bad weather, a sudden outbreak of the avian flu, a busted disc on a cultivator can wipe out a farm's profit in an instant. Even after he married my mother, an efficient organizer who adhered to a budget as tightly as twine to a hay bale, they went broke after five years due to nothing more than bad luck.

In 2006 I read *The Worst Hard Time* by Timothy Egan. It tells the stories of farmers and town folk who were overtaken by the Dust Bowl of the 1930s. These were the people who stayed on the High Plains, even as the land shifted under their feet, smothered their babies, and killed their livestock, while others, like Steinbeck's fictional Joads, migrated westward. I was awed by the stories of those who hunkered down and survived. I read the book three times. As the daughter of a young farm couple who couldn't make it, the book stirred me deeply.

My response was to write a novel set in that time and place. A mystery novel—for the High Plains in the 1930s were, after all, a place of social unrest, violent and destructive duststorms that turned day into night . . . and fear. *Death of a Rainmaker* also taps into my abiding fascination with history. It is a tale about the endless ripples of an individual's past, pushing onward until the last breath.

—Laurie Loewenstein

## EDITOR'S NOTE

### KAYLIE JONES ON DEATH OF A RAINMAKER

Laurie Loewenstein's first novel, *Unmentionables*, was the flagship publication of Kaylie Jones Books. The novel's critical and commercial success set the tone for the imprint, now in its fifth year. Laurie's second novel, *Death of a Rainmaker*, in my opinion surpasses that wonderful first novel, and is a tour de force that will stand the test of time.

Working with an author of this quality and dedication has been one of the great gifts of my life as an editor and publisher. Kaylie Jones Books couldn't be more proud and honored that Laurie chose, once again, to put her faith and trust in our young indie press.

Though structured as a classic murder mystery, the novel is also so much more than that. It is a literary novel of great beauty and tenderness that addresses the timeless issues of poverty and courage in the face of catastrophe. She describes in great detail a country in the throes of the Great Depression, divided between rich and poor, the haves and the have-nots, where the people in power think nothing of throwing families out into the street with nothing but the shirts on their backs. We have a town sheriff suffering quietly from the death of his young son who'd rather avoid the pain by burying himself in his work. We have his wife, who on the other hand can't stop thinking about her dead boy, then suddenly meets a homeless teenager who reawakens her motherly love and protectiveness. Unfortunately, he is her husband's main suspect in the murder of a charlatan rainmaker passing through the desperate town. At a time when women held very little sway in the workings of local government, Etha, the sheriff's wife, takes a stand against injustice and puts everything she knows and everything she believes in, including her abiding love for her husband, on the line to save the boy.

—Kaylie Jones

# PRAISE FOR **UNMENTIONABLES** BY LAURIE LOEWENSTEIN

“Exceptionally readable and highly recommended.”

—**Library Journal** (starred review)

Included in the **Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel's** “96 Books For Your Summer Reading List”

**Selected by the Midwest Independent Booksellers Association as a Midwest Connections pick**

“Engaging first work from a writer of evident ability.”

—**Kirkus Reviews**

“Marian Elliot Adams’ . . . tale is contagiously enthusiastic.”

—**Publishers Weekly**

“*Unmentionables* is a sweeping and memorable story of struggle and suffrage, love and redemption . . . Loewenstein has skillfully woven a story and a cast of characters that will remain in the memory long after the book’s last page has been turned.”

—**New York Journal of Books**

“Readers will be fascinated by this timeless glimpse into a slice of American history on the brink of significant change, whose memorable characters are both vulnerable and engaging. I loved this book!”

—**Boswell Book Company** (staff pick)

“*Unmentionables* starts small and expands to touch Chicago and war-torn France as Laurie Loewenstein weaves multiple points of view together to create a narrative of social change and the stubbornness of the human heart.”

—**Black Heart Magazine**

“A historical, feminist romance in the positive senses of all three terms: a realistic evocation of small-town America circa 1917, including its racial tensions; a tale about standing up for the equitable treatment of women; and a story about two lonely people who overcome obstacles, including their own character defects, to find love together.”

—**Milwaukee Journal Sentinel**

“*Unmentionables* is a love story and a journey of self-discovery.”

—**Historical Novel Society**

“Loewenstein isn’t afraid to let her characters develop a little more deeply than you’d expect.”

—**Spacebeer**

“This is a period that begs for great sweeping novels and I was especially happy to lose myself in the lives of these interesting people . . . This is how we live, after all, with so much big and small going on around us.”

—**Chasing Ray**

# NATIONAL EVENTS FEATURING LAURIE LOEWENSTEIN

Friday, October 5, 2018 | 6:30 PM

**NEW YORK, NY**

The Mysterious Bookshop

58 Warren Street

*Launch event for Death of a Rainmaker.*

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