

## The Boy Who Made it Rain



When a school tragedy happens, you probably lay the blame on society, the Internet, TV or violent films. Not many of you think it could be the parents' or the teachers' fault, do you? But then, is it? We all have our say, spout off opinions according to our view of the world. In this novel, too, they all have their say, but who's right?

By Brian Conaghan

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**Brian Conaghan** was born and raised in the Scottish town of Coatbridge. He is a graduate of Glasgow University, where he received, among other qualifications, a Master of Letters in Creative Writing.

Sparkling Books discovered Brian and published this, his first, novel.

Brian is also author of seven further titles.

### About the book

At only sixteen Clem's world is turned upside down. His Willy-Loman-like father, a travelling salesman and a loser, is transferred from Eastbourne to Glasgow and along with him go Clem and his meek accommodating mother. But Glasgow is rough and Clem's posh English accent is not well-accepted in the sink school he attends. And he's a brilliant scholar. He soon becomes the target for McEvoy's group of thugs for whom slashing faces is the most important ambition in their depraved lives.

### Reviews

"...innovative and insightful... couldn't wait to devour part two" - *Times Educational Supplement*

"I will unashamedly admit that when I began reading **The Boy Who Made It Rain**, I was utterly flabbergasted. I began reading it early in the morning and I didn't put it down until I had finished it that evening, and though it's only 196 pages long, this is perhaps one of the most compelling novels I've ever read.

"The premise of the book is of the relocation of a family from Eastbourne to Glasgow, and of the stigma faced by the son as he tries to settle into the local school. Interestingly, Conaghan initiates the novel in a series of first person interviews with several (seven in fact) characters. This automatically initiates a much stronger relationship with the text because the multiple first-person perspectives allow a great deal of empathy and understanding to develop for each character very rapidly.

“Very early on, it becomes apparent that Conaghan is building up to something, his interviews taking on the shape of statements. Each ‘statement’ is crafted to be long enough to build up the picture just a little bit more, to give just a little more away, but not enough to say with any certainty the final outcome. And this is the crux: long before you finish the first half of the novel with the character’s statements, to move onto the second half concerning the protagonist’s recollection of events, you have a horrible inkling of what’s going to happen. Grim inevitability coupled with fantastic word-craft is what makes you turn those pages, and Conaghan does not disappoint... When you turn that last page I guarantee you will feel numb with shock.” - *Heffers Review, Cambridge*

“Brilliant writing, brilliant structure, brilliant book” - *Des Dillon, author of Me and Ma Gal*

“... definitely up there with the modern classics” - *What? Magazine*

“A Must-Read for Teens and Adults: **The Boy Who Made It Rain** is an innovative novel that will keep you glued to the story until you turn the last page and learn the final outcome.” - *Fran Lewis, New York Reviewer.*

“Told from different points of view, Brian Conaghan’s THE BOY WHO MADE IT RAIN, shows what happens when a boy finds himself in a strange school, the target of many other kids and as well as vicious rumors, and the resulting violence that occurs.

“This is no fantasy – kids can be vicious – just remember the names you used to call your friends, rumors you would hear, how easy it was to make someone a scapegoat. Of course bullying is not isolated to kids – we see it clearly in domestic and international politics on a grand scale.

“Brian Conaghan uses mounting suspense and an ironic ending to show us not only the consequences of violence, but its utter uselessness as well.

“THE BOY WHO MADE IT RAIN is a valuable, gripping read” - *Bill Baker, Educator, USA*

“Clem is the newcomer/English outcast at his Scottish high school. He has really only made one friend, Rosie. This doesn’t stop others from forming opinions of him and even spreading some nasty rumors.

“This book has a really interesting structure. Clem is the main character but we don’t really meet him until halfway through. Instead, we get monologues from other characters sharing their opinions/observations about Clem. Through these minor characters we begin to get a sense of Clem and we also begin to realize that something very bad may have happened. Perhaps something on a Columbine scale. The structure really adds to the feeling of foreboding. It was really extremely well done.

“I really believe this book is going to begin appearing on required reading lists for many, many English classes. I also believe the students won’t mind. The author has done an excellent job of capturing different speaking styles and voices for each of his characters. Just what a writing teacher needs for a mentor text.

“Verdict: Highly recommended,

“Challenge Alert: lots of realistic cussing. Although, quite a lot of that cussing is spelled with a Scottish accent so maybe parents won’t realize it.” - *Stephanie Lott, Educator, USA*

“This is a brilliantly written book. I read it in one sitting, I just could not put it down.

“It is the story of Clem - a new boy who has moved from Eastbourne to Glasgow with his parents.

“It is written in a narrative style with each chapter written from a different character’s point of view. They are all writing with hindsight after a major event has occurred which the reader is left to guess about right up to the very end.

“The last section is Clem’s own narrative telling us his thoughts, feelings and actions, from finding out he is moving right through to the magnificent climax.

“This book will keep you enthralled throughout. The characters are exceptionally well described and revealed through their dialogue...” - *Adele Symonds, Reviewer UK*

## Excerpt

### Rosie Farrell’s First Impression

We met when Clem first came to our school. It was two weeks into term. He was from somewhere down in the south of England. I don’t know. I’d never heard of the place. Still haven’t, even though he told me about it loads of times. Sounds rubbish wherever it is though. He had a funny accent, that’s why everyone sort of fancied him. Including most of the out guys. Cora said he had that Robbie Williams thing going on...all the guys wanted to be him and all the girls wanted to...well, you know. He didn’t say much at first; just did his work and kept his head down. Bore a minute.

Yes, he was smart. Dead smart. He’d read all these things that we couldn’t even pronounce, all this foreign stuff. Get a life, right? But he wasn’t a big-headed bragger or anything like that. I wasn’t much of a reader so I thought I was well out of his league. Not that I really wanted to be in it in the first place. I usually find all that stuff dead boring. Reading and all that.

English was his thing though; he sat down the front like a pure teacher’s pet. He was into challenging them all the time. The teachers. Having all these debates about dead dull stuff. Nonsense. Boreathon, right? I thought Miss Croal flirted with him from day one. She was one of those fresh-out-of-training- college teachers. And they’re all the same. They come breezing in with heads full of Hollywood films and a desire to ‘make a difference.’ Airheads with no clue whatsoever. To tell you the truth it was kind of embarrassing watching her make an eejit out of herself. Revelling in thinking she was this kind of fountain of knowledge. Fountain of lavvy water more like! Honestly, Miss Croal was as bright as a blackout. No, I didn’t take the mickey. Not my style, I’m a passive observer. Yes, some people did. But not bullying or intimidation, or anything like that. Well, it’s a bit of a red neck, but my friend Cora used to say Miss Croal’s gagging for her hole when she started flirting and flicking the eyes to all the guys. Once she actually said it to her face, but in rhyming slang.

She said, erm, gantin for your Nat King, Miss? Croal would never have guessed what it meant. She was probably from the posh part of town. The West End or something.

She was like that, Cora, real brash, in your face stuff. But she was a howl.

Yes, he was different from the other guys and not just because he was clever, or good-looking. Well, he wasn’t good-looking in a conventional sense, but he could’ve definitely been one of those Benetton models. You know, the ones who are borderline ugly. That’s what Cora thought anyway. There were loads of girls who thought he was like all Mr Mysterious, but to me he was more like Mr Weirdo. I said to Cora that there was something no right about him, like concealing a secret or something. Sometimes I’d catch him staring right at me, not in a freak-show way, more in a crying-

out-for-a-friend way.

Was I popular? When I was in fifth-year all the fifth- and sixth-years kept asking me out. I kept telling them to blow town. Which is a way of saying go away. Or rather Cora did on my behalf. None of them did anything for me. I snogged a couple of them but nothing beyond that. Or enough to get the heart cartwheeling. I wouldn't have gone that far with the guys at my school. No way. So, yes you could say that I was popular, but I wasn't a bitch or anything like that...it wasn't like The O.C. it was real life, and we were into keeping it real. Real real not in the rap way. I had friends from all the groups. Apart from the NEDs that is...Up here we call them NEDs...means Non Educated Delinquents. Could be a lot worse I suppose, like TITs...Total Idiot Thickos.

He was just different...well...because...because...well for a start, he had an accent. Anyone who had a different accent was automatically deemed to be cool. It's a sort of unwritten law in schools, isn't it? I mean if I went to an American school I'd be fighting them off with a big stick. He said words like girl and film without pronouncing the R or L properly. Gwul. It was kind of cute. And then there was his name. Most guys here are bogged down in all this I-want-to-be-Irish guff. Just because they were seventeenth generation Irish, or something like that, they all thought they were pure dead Irish. I mean, get a life! I blame their parents. Look around, everyone's called Liam, Keron, Conor, Sean, Niall or some other duff Irish name. It's really boring and predictable. So when we first heard the name Clem we thought it was pure hilarious. Then we realised that the name Clem made him sort of stand out from all the Irish wannabes. It was bomb how his name had that whole alliteration thing going on as well, Clem Curran. You know, C and C. That's one thing I can thank Miss Croal for. I'm not exactly like Shakespeare at English but she explained what alliteration was by using his name as an example, that's how it sunk in. When I'm an old woman, forty or fifty or something, and I hear the word alliteration I'll automatically say 'Clem Curran' in my head. 'Cool Clem Curran' I said to Cora. 'Classy Cora and Cool Clem Curran cruising and kissing in a convertible coupe' she said back. I don't think kissing counts but. Suppose that was the start of it. No, it was that badge.

I had a Bright Eyes badge on my bag. Not the wee rabbits! Bright Eyes, the band. They were my favourites at that time. Not now. I still like them and all, but you know what young people are like. We change our favourite things from one week to the next. From one day to the next. Anyway, I was listening to loads of Bright Eyes stuff, couldn't get enough of them. So I went out and bought some badges for my bag. You know this fad with bags full of badges? I was tapping into it. If my mum put badges on her bags I'd be pure morto... Mortified.

Right, so me and Clem were partnered together in our Italian class to do some role-play stuff about tourists asking for directions in Rome, or somewhere like that. I mean, when will that ever come in handy? Don't get me started on language classes at our school. Anyway we were giving it all the 'you need to go straight down the road and turn left then take the first right and then you will see the Spanish Steps' jargon, all in Italian of course, when he clocks the Bright Eyes badge on my bag.

'I didn't know you were an emo chick', he said.

I said, 'who are you calling a flippin emu? And never call me a chick again.'

I didn't actually say the word flippin, did I?

Then when he told me what emo meant I felt like a total Paris. Then we had a conversation about music and school and students and teachers and just general angsty teenager car-crash stuff. He had some good chat. He told me where he was from, but it sounded too dull so we spoke about me. When I went home that night I was thinking about him loads and the next day I sort of fancied him.

I'd just then discovered The Smiths.

### **Cora Kelly's Opinion**

Oh my God! It's not as if I fancied Clem or anything. Rosie's a pure liar if she said that. I can't believe people would even think that. That's a pure riot. We spoke about him:

A. Coz he was new to the school

and

B. Coz that's what we do when chatting about the guys.

All girls do that. You should hear what they say about us, by the way. Someone put it around that I gave this wee third-year a five-ten-double-ten after the third-year disco...A hand jive...you know, pulled him off. Then I heard all these wee third-years whispering to each other in the corridor. So I went to the guy with the motor gub and said that I'd boot his nose through his ear if he didn't say it was a load of crap. Let's say he quickly took it all back. I mean, why would I turn up at a third-year disco in the first place? I'm not into jiggling away to The Jonas Brothers thank you very much. What I'm saying is don't believe everything you hear in here that's all. All it takes is one text message and the next thing you're the biggest slut in the whole school. Sometimes I wish I could go back to the olden days when they didn't have mobiles. My mum still talks about those days. Can you imagine it but? You'd be pure Billy No Mates.

Actually Rosie knew that I sort of fancied Conor Duffy. Even though he was into like football and all that male bonding crap, which is way uncool. I still liked him. Away from his pals he was actually okay. I could just about stomach all that hail! hail! the Celts are here drivel but there's no way I could've put up with all that we're-from-the-hood mince. Yeah right, in Glasgow? And you should hear the way they talk, as if they're from the manky part of town, with that pure cartoon Glasgow accent. It's totally put on coz I've heard the way some of them talk to their mums, and it's a billion miles from what comes out their traps in school. But I definitely drew the line at all the hip-hop singing and references. I mean have you heard 50Cent and JayZ done in a Scottish accent? Sounds like an idiot with a speech impediment. I still liked him though.

It's like one of those guilty...thingymajigs...pleasures, that's right. A guilty pleasure. Rosie said he was a bit of a tosser, so I tried not to like him. No, I don't always do what Rosie tells me to do. You listen to your mates, don't you? I'm not hiding stuff here.

Clem?

Clem was okay, in a boring I'm-into-books-and-reading-all-the-time type of way. He had a funny name and a funny accent. Some girls are attracted to all that. They were all saying he was the spit of some guy from The OC but I never watch The OC so I couldn't really say. Too much teeth for my liking. To me it was like listening to someone off Eastenders or Hollyoaks. That's the most erotic it gets here...No, I don't mean that...Different, that's all...Exotic then. Erotic exotic same thing.

After about a week in school he had everyone eating out the palm of his hand. I called it the Robbie Williams effect. You know, all the guys want to...how do you know? Anyway there were some girls, especially in the year below, who were slobbering whenever he passed by them in the corridor, like they were at some JLS music store gig. It was pathetic. Believe it or not Miss Croal was the worst though.

She was practically salivating every time he came into her English class. Even I was embarrassed for

her. No, I never gave her a hard time over it...well, maybe the odd wee comment here or there...nothing nasty.

Sometimes these new teachers need to be put in their place. It happens to them all. They're all full of innovation. It's so annoying. I mean, just give us a book and let us read it, or we'll pretend we're reading it. We don't have to examine what every blinking word means. I didn't even want to do English, it's not like I was going to do it as a career or anything like that. It's a boring head wreck. Worse than going to the school mass. I still look in the dictionary for swear words in English class to keep it exciting, that's how bad it is. Why do schools force everybody to do it? It doesn't make any sense. I say let all the nerds do it if they want and let the rest of us do extra classes on the subjects we enjoy...I sort of wanted to be a vet, but I'm mince at Biology and I don't really like the sight of blood. But I do like animals...who knows, maybe I'll do a drama course or something, I don't know yet. My guidance teacher suggested beauty therapy, and I was like: Christ on a bike, Sir, I'm not that thick.

It was kind of worrying when Clem came to the school coz I was worried that me and Rosie would both fancy him and there would be this pure tension between us, so I tried dead hard not to fancy him. Then when I heard him talking all that rubbish in the English class I knew that I could never fancy him. Not my type, you see. I reckon he must have been a Libran or something, coz Sagittarians and Librans can't stand each other. Or is it Leos? Whatever he was, I could tell that we were totally out of sync. But I could tell that Rosie liked him. She was like pure rash material always looking at him when he wasn't looking and going all red and shy when he was about. For a time I thought she was going to turn into some mad-stalker bird. Thing is, Rosie could have gotten any guy in the school. All of fifth- and sixth-year guys thought she was a ride. She didn't cake herself in make-up like most of the dogs in fifth- and sixth-year, who thought they were pure God's gift. That's the thing about Rosie, she didn't know how good-looking she was.

I wasn't jealous...why would I be jealous? I had loads of guys chasing me. Even guys with cars and guys who were, like, working. I could hold my own. I didn't want a bf...boyfriend. I couldn't be arsed with all that 'childhood sweethearts' crap. It's not as if I was a slapper or anything like that, I just didn't want the hassle of a bf. No way. Stuff that! Half the girls from third-year up are probably on the pill so it's no great surprise. In fact, if you believe any of the stories in this place, half of the lassies in our year have probably been marched down to the abortion clinic at one time or another while the other half pop the morning-after pill as if they're Tic-Tacs. I was always careful. It's not like it's the eighties we're in. Anyway me and Rosie were totally different, not just in looks, for a start she was into all that oh-I'm-dead-depressed-I'm-going-to-slit-my-wrists music. She tried for ages to get me into it but it just made me want to self harm. I need beats and rhythm. Even if I wanted to I could never have fancied Clem; I'd never have done anything to hurt Rosie. She was my best pal.

Of course I'm shocked...

Am I sad? That's another thing, isn't it?

### **Pauline Croal's Understanding**

It was my first position out of teacher training college so naturally I approached the job with a great deal of enthusiasm. I also had a duty to my students to engage them in the subject. Long gone are the days of the antiquated practice of teaching from the board or enforcing individual study throughout the duration of the lesson. I did try to be more innovative and foster an environment more conducive to the learning process. It's also what we were encouraged to do at college. After all, it's the reason I

entered the profession.

No, I didn't find the school that difficult. Obviously I had no point of reference, however, I am led to believe from various members of staff that it was a tolerable school to work in. My own schooling wasn't that far removed from my teaching experience there. The school was full of characters. I liked that. Both students and staff alike. It's fair to say that some older members of staff didn't like their feathers being ruffled; they prefer to exist in the malaise. All that stereotypical stuff we are warned about as students, coffee mugs and specific seats belonging to certain teachers are all true. A solid phalanx of hostility was apparent. There is a definite hierarchy in school staffrooms. A few months of observing the political situations, I found it stuffy and embittered. There seemed no desire to embrace change; too many teachers were set in their ways, waiting for the bells to ring, for the summer to come around. There was also the cynicism that grated on me. Lots of my colleagues had nothing positive to say about the students they taught. To be honest I was a touch surprised by the sheer disregard and contempt they had for their profession. In any other industry they would have been sacked. However many teachers simply close their doors and exercise a methodology that has no place in modern education practice. It's too difficult to sack teachers these days. You have to cross a particular threshold for that to happen...I am babbling. I have a tendency to do that.

Obviously I am aware that this is a generalisation because not all teachers were like this. Some of us cared. I cared about my students and I invested in them. I endeavoured to encourage and cajole my students into developing a love for my subject. No, it didn't always work.

I suppose that's teaching for you. It could be said that I used my students as a solace from the challenges of the staffroom. They were my escape. I was continuously alert to the fact that I wouldn't allow the passion and fervour I showed for my subject to be misconstrued or misinterpreted. I was always aware of that. It's every teacher's nightmare. I was no different in that respect.

It was like any other fifth- and sixth-year class, some showed a real desire for English, others apathy, some quiet and unassuming while others were boisterous. Just your average classroom gene pool. Rosie Farrell? There was nothing that struck me as odd about Rosie; your typical senior-year girl, full of teenage angst and misplaced rebellion. She had a thing about me...that's not what I mean.

I mean she was distant and resentful for some reason. We didn't really develop much of a teacher/student relationship it has to be said. I had the impression that she felt that I had a different agenda other than that of getting them involved in the subject and success in their exam, which was in fact my only agenda. I have no idea whatsoever why she felt this way. I certainly wasn't going to challenge a sixteen-year-old girl on such matters. After all, I was the one who was in the position of responsibility. I had to show maturity, leadership and integrity; confronting a student simply because you have a distinct feeling that that student doesn't like you is unprofessional and short-sighted. I am afraid I wasn't that insecure about myself, or my methods, either.

Having said that, my understanding was that Rosie was a clever girl, sharp as a tac as well. I believed that she was more than capable of achieving anything she wanted to achieve. Actually I liked her individuality, or her desire to be individual. She seemingly didn't subscribe to what her peers were interested in. As regards her dress sense, the music she listened to or her general attitude, she was what you would call an emo girl. Which means emotional. It's related to that type of music. Emotional music, I'd imagine. It goes further than that, obviously, in the sense that it's linked to the general aesthetic and attitude. Iconoclastic, and subversive with a small 's'. Rosie certainly fell into that category; she was a fusion of these things. It's not as though we teachers don't listen to music. It should be a prerequisite that we have to garner knowledge of popular culture. If anything we are more attuned to teenagers than any other profession. I'd advise all teachers to watch the X Factor,

Big Brother or The Inbetweeners. It's about trying to engage. It's not rocket science, you know.

Rosie had a flair for English; however, I don't think she could comprehend this. At times it's tough to be objective, to have that ability to stand outside yourself and analyse successes and areas for improvement. Maybe that's where teachers come in handy. I could tell that she had real potential. My understanding was that she enjoyed Macbeth and some of Shakespeare's sonnets.

I thought Cora Kelly was a noose around Rosie's neck. It was obvious that she was a bad influence on her; perhaps it was based on some intellectual inferiority complex or, indeed, a visual one. You know how teenage girls can be. I understood there to be a hint of resentment within that friendship. Cora could be an odious character, but there was something charmingly heartbreaking about her at the same time. She required an audience; if Rosie wasn't in class for whatever reason Cora was like a morose dog without its owner. There was something more profound going on with that girl. None of my colleagues had a good word to say about her, but please don't take that as any kind of barometer. There was no way on earth that she was going to pass her exam. Why? Simply because she was weak, and indolent. I think it was suggested to her that she was maybe better off leaving school and enrolling in the local technical college to study beauty therapy. In my mind it was a good idea. I am not sure why she didn't; my theory is that she enjoyed the comforts, camaraderie and security that school provided her with.

Clem Curran? Well, that's the story, isn't it?

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