



## Rubyfruit Jungle

*Rita Mae Brown*

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## **Rubyfruit Jungle** Rita Mae Brown

Bawdy and moving, the ultimate word-of-mouth bestseller, Rubyfruit Jungle is about growing up a lesbian in America--and living happily ever after.

### **Rubyfruit Jungle Details**

Date : Published October 1980 by Bantam Books (first published 1973)

ISBN : 9780553146967

Author : Rita Mae Brown

Format : Mass Market Paperback 246 pages

Genre : Fiction, Lgbt, Glbt, Queer, Lesbian, Classics

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## From Reader Review Rubyfruit Jungle for online ebook

### Hilary says

Definitely an interesting historical look at some concepts (lesbianism, feminine gender roles in society). I did think it was a little heavy-handed and presumptuous at times (the fact that every woman the protagonist is interested in wants to sleep with her as well, the idea that anyone who can throw off the shackles of societal standards would prefer to be a lesbian because the sex is objectively better, etc.) Also her talent for her chosen career is portrayed in very tell-don't-show manner (my 8th grade English teacher would not approve). And in the end, I wasn't clear if the message was more of a general nonconformist message, feminist, or pro-lesbian. Still, I see why this book was important in its time.

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### Tatiana says

i swear i already wrote a review of this book but maybe not.

okay, so you're young, you've suddenly realized you're a lesbian. one out of every two people you talk to in the next year are going to recommend rubyfruit jungle. it is THE coming out book. i wonder if gay men have an equivalent. anyway. personally, i think this book is overhyped. let's remember that this is the same lady who writes murder mysteries with her CAT. that's right, not about her cat, but with her cat. co-authored. i mean, i love cats and all, but... anyway. poor southern lesbian comes out, runs around, hijinks ensue. personally, i would sneak into your room at night and replace this book with a dorothy allison book. i think you would thank me.

sigh. but yes, i suppose, it's a valid part of the process. we can't just dismiss ms. brown on account of she's a crazy cat lady. and she did get a bar named after the book, so that's gotta count for something.

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### Samantha A says

Oh, I loved this book. I laughed and I cried and it reminded me to be so thankful and grateful for those who came before me and paved the way. Those who made it possible for me to be out and comfortable enough to not have my life crashing down around me because of who I love. We have come so far, but we truly still have so far to go.

I want to live in a world where I can walk down the street holding my girlfriends hand without having to endure the nasty stares and the horrible comments muttered under strangers breaths. I want to live in a world where I am not called unrighteous or unnatural or nasty or disgusting because I happen to love women. I want to live in a world where I can be free to be myself and not have to hide who I am as if it's some nasty secret, just so I can keep a job (You can still be fired from your job in 29 states for being lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and fired in 38 states for being transgender). I want to live in a world where people aren't being killed because of who they love, where I can go to a gay club or bar and not have to fear for my life because of who I am. I want to live in a world where people don't think that WHO I AM is wrong. I may never see a world completely devoid of all these things, but I will continue to fight for my rights and the rights of my brothers and sisters and hope that maybe my children will see that world, maybe their children will see that

world.

This book not only dealt with the struggles of being lgbtq in the 60's-70's, but also the struggles of being a woman, which is another issue that we still have to fight for to this day. It is unreal how we can come so far as a country and yet still have so much inequality in this world. Women and POC have to work 10x as hard to achieve something that a white man is given.

I am proud of who I am and I refuse to watch this country take a leap backwards. I will go down fighting trying to prevent that.

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### **Jennifer Peas says**

I've read this book about 8 times in the last 18 years. In it, she mentions bagels & lox. I only JUST, at age 31, figured out what LOX was, though... Thankfully I understood everything else in the book, so we're good. I was just late on the lox stuff.

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### **Lualncol says**

Tatiana is not being fair. RMB wrote this book reasonably early in her career, 30 years ago. The humor of the time was different, the references were different, shock value was different, risque was different. At the time it was shockingly welcome. It is still today a very joyful, affirming book for gay, straight, adopted, natural, or just unique.

RMB is older and mellower now (see cat mysteries!) but this is an important, albeit fictionalized, documentation of her thoughts and development at a very important and defining time in her life. Read it again and think young with sharp egdes-

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### **Nathan says**

I read this for my LGBTQIA literature, culture and criticism class, and from it grew a bit of a debate about its artistic merit.

There's definitely quite the case against *Rubyfruit Jungle*. It hasn't aged particularly well. There's a scene where Molly actually says that "sex with women is dynamite." and many other moments where outdated slang rears its head. Then Brown spends the whole novel plopping one poop joke after another on the reader. The only moments where Brown waxes poetic are when she is not so subtly spoon feeding the reader the message that queer women are capable of all the depth and humanity of heterosexual men. Characters names are used just to point out their relationships with other characters (like Paul and Polina and Holly and Molly). And the only characters that really show any dynamicism are Leroy and Carrie.

But none of that stopped me from loving it. Not even in the slightest.

Even in 1973, *Rubyfruit Jungle* wasn't seen as remarkable for the traditional literary reasons; it was radical for its ideas. The truths Brown writes are every bit as hidden and denied in 2016 as they were then. There's the fact that female eroticism is denied to serve an antiquated ideal of "purity", and with it the fact that

Americans think that human sexuality is inherently impure. Molly is happiest when she is able to explore her own sensuality on her own terms. Carrie's love for Carl dies and with it any chance of her future happiness when she realizes that he had slept with other women before her.

There's the fact that Carrie's whole happiness depends on Carl in the first place. The women in this novel know that they are valuable as long as they have a man. It's why Leotta disregards her queerness, settles down and encourages Molly to do the same. It's why Polina is never really comfortable with the idea of being in love with Molly. It's why Molly herself dates a quarterback throughout high school. The world around Molly believes that a single woman is simply a woman unclaimed and therefore a woman vulnerable.

And there's the fact that the patriarchy values women the most as an accessory to the heterosexual male libido. Molly is hated by her fellow students because she exposes the way that women's minds aren't valued in film. The whole room grows uncomfortable not because of the excessive "artistic pornography" the men make, but because Molly dares to show an older woman speaking honestly about her life. Molly was broke and without a job until a man with a kink pulled her off the streets to throw grapefruit at his chest. This isn't a chronicle of Molly overcoming the homophobia and misogyny she encounters, this is an account of a woman who finally recognizes the trap of a white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy.

And that to me is as artistic as a novel can get.

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### **Matt says**

It always amazes me how much you can gain even from the smallest book—if it is written right. I am not exactly predestined to make profound statements here. Compared to the main character I have the wrong sex and am in the wrong age. I also live in the wrong country, at the wrong time, and was not brought up by foster parents. Over and above I'm heterosexual. So what attracts me to Molly Bolt so much? Why can I identify with her? I guess it's her individuality, her unique character, the swimming against the tide, her fighting the odds which were against her from the very start. And it is the profoundly moral and, ultimately, human core she owns, that is hidden under the sometimes harsh profanity, the various sexual encounters, even in the struggles with her adoptive mother. And this, the core of a moral human being, has nothing to do with gender, age, place or time. And certainly not with one's sexual orientation.

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### **Books, Vertigo and Tea (Danielle) says**

As always, you may also find this review on the blog.

### **My Thoughts**

*Rubyfruit Jungle* was selected by Ceri from Bookmarks and Postcards as part of my running feature, *You Choose, I Read*. As soon as I read the short, sweet synopsis and skimmed a few reviews, I knew this was kismet. I cannot honestly say how this book has flown under my radar for so long. I am almost ashamed of

this fact. But thanks to Ceri, we have been rightfully united. I love this book!

### **The skinny..**

This is a fictional biography of sorts following the life of Molly Bolt from young adolescence into adulthood. Molly realizes at a young age that she is attracted to women and is brilliantly unapologetic for this. Determined to pave her way and set her own rules in a world “run” by men with very narrow views on sexuality, she sets out on a driven but often hard path of self-discovery to obtain her own goals and desires.

***“All this overt heterosexuality amused me. If only they knew.”***

### **What I appreciated..**

Molly is beautifully, shamelessly unapologetic about who she is, all that she feels and her own desires. She embodies the traits I love and seek out not only in protagonists but in humans. She simply is and embraces herself.

*Rubyfruit Jungle* presents multiple, often still (sadly) relevant themes addressing misconceptions, challenges, and the labeling that the LGBTQ+ community faces as well as being a woman and/or queer in a misogynistic & racist society and even explores adoption. This book covers so much!

Rita Mae Brown’s writing is colorful, bold and raw. She creates a story that while entertaining is significantly something much more. She intelligently explores the uncomfortable with a sense of wit and humor that will make her story more accessible to audiences.

The linear narrative provides a steady, solid character development that facilitates an effortless reading experience.

*Rubyfruit Jungle* offers a sense of relatability and hope that I admired and benefited from on a personal level. I felt stronger and better for having completed its pages.

***“I wished I could get up in the morning and look at the day the way I used to when I was a child. I wished I could walk down the streets and not hear those constant, abrasive sounds from the mouths of the opposite sex. Damn, I wished the world would let me be myself.”***

### **Challenges some may encounter..**

There is one particular relationship I found to be problematic and I feel other readers will as well.

There are moments Rita Mae’s writing can easily be described as vulgar and graphic. Please expect to encounter sexual content, derogatory language and other possibly uncomfortable topics pertinent to the themes contained within. (As always, if you have any questions before approaching it feel free to message or email me.)

***“The most revolutionary thing you can do is to be yourself, to speak your truth, to open your arms to life including the pain. Passion. Find your passions.***

*Rubyfruit Jungle* is brazen and bold. Written during the 70s, it surely should have taken the world by storm! It is a charming and daring coming of age story with a rewarding and spirited protagonist that I am not likely to forget. It has effortlessly earned a spot among my favorites.

**?Pair Molly’s energetic, feisty attitude with your favorite chai or spiced blend.?**

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## **Sabrina Chapadjiev says**

Seeing as I've been dating women for awhile, I figured I'd finally read this classic of lesbo lit. My review in one word, "eh..."

I mean, Brown's got a great handle on a fierce character, and there are streaks of beauty in this jammed story, but the main problem it has more ego than Ayn Rand (whom I love, btw). Rae's main character, Molly, is strong willed, defiant, and brutally brilliant against her slow as molasses thinkin' counterparts and family members. I'm one for a hard headed, knows what she wants type-a woman, but there is no fault in Molly. Brown heaps undulating audiences who are speared by Molly's wit on every side. You can only assume that Molly is a thinly veiled autobiographical character, but this is where her defiant "I'm smarter than 'em all" characteristic bleeds into the writing, which is as undulant and as flawed as her main character. Brown's character is not human, she's the super-human Sapphic wish on steroids, she's all spear and no handle, and in all honesty, it just feels like you're reading the story of someone telling you how great they are at all times. There is little nuance, little moments of understanding and in truth, little sense of a full character. Molly's a one-dimensional savior to all those Lesbo, and if you're Lesbo yourself, or just discovering that you have an inner Lesbo and need to nurture it, by all means, take Rubyfruit Jungle out and have a field day. Still, it's a quick read, and definitely has it's place in the cannon of both feminist and gay lit, so take a read if you're into that. As for Brown though, I simply wished she had a better editor. She possible did, and then fired her, though.

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## **Mel says**

I was quite disappointed in this. It was the first lesbian classic that I didn't love. First of all she didn't end up "happy". She was alone and had a qualification in an industry which was too sexist to let her get a job in her field. That's not a happy ending. The thing that I love best about the old pulps are that they are so breathtakingly and heartbreakingly honest. The emotions in them are so raw. This just felt cold and artificial. She moved from one stage of her life to the other and nothing affected her. She started very poor, as a tomboy but then got amazing grades and became popular simply cause she was smart. Being smart is not enough to get you fantastic grades, your environment and social standing has a huge effect on you. She seemed to be miserable one day, then outstanding the next, and then willing to throw it all away, to declare she was a lesbian, when she knew what the reaction would be. Likewise the part where she was homeless for a couple days felt equally false, she found someone got a deposit and then magically got a scholarship and a good job without a thought. She also never seemed to care about any of the women she slept with. Her definition for being a lesbian seemed to be that she enjoyed sex with women more than she did sex with men, (though a lot of the sex with either gender was unsatisfactory to her). But she never seemed to fall in love or actually care about anyone. The resolution with her mother felt false as well. The woman had been emotionally abusive her whole life and then it was ok just cause she was her mother? Er no, even if you are someone's mom you still need to treat them with respect. I can't recommend this at all, read Ann Bannon, Stone Butch Blues, Radclyffe Hall, pretty much anything else instead.

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## **Sophie says**

I read this book by accident. Literally and metaphorically, as was trapped in a foreign hospital without anything to read. After pleading with anyone who'd listen (in bad German), one of the nurses said she had

one English book at home and this is what she brought me.

By the look of the 70s cover and dreadful blurb making it out to be some sort of erotic lesbo fiction, it didn't look like the sort of book I'd choose for company over Christmas. It just shows you shouldn't judge a book by its cover. And after the stomach-churning schmaltz of 'Miracle on Regent Street' it was read cover to cover at lightening speed.

Intelligently written, coming of age story with a very likeable main character, Molly, who never accepts an answer or will be told what to do, and kicks against all her disadvantages and the bigotry facing her. It was funny too - the description of the children's nativity play in the local school is priceless.

Not sure why I've never come across this author before - may be worth investigating her back catalogue based on this one. As, apparently it was a bestseller when first published.

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### **Amelia says**

Hmm.

Things I liked about this book:

- 1) The way that Molly described her mother's politics as "to the right of Genghis Khan." That is perhaps the best line I have read, ever. Which is important because I generally think that this book was terribly written, and that the dialogue wasn't realistic at all.
- 2) How anti-marriage and anti-having children this book is. Because I'm an asshole who doesn't want to get married or have kids.
- 3) The fact that Molly didn't graduate from college and become wildly successful. I wanted to root for her, but at the same time, I didn't want it to be this whole cheesy "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" novel. And it wasn't. And that was cool.

Things I didn't like about this book:

- 1) Even though I said above that I liked how anti-marriage and anti-having kids this book is, because I'm a jerk, I think it was a little too black and white in just saying, "I hate men; who needs 'em?" Basically, as someone who read this in 2013, this book just reeked of second wave feminism. Which is fine because it was written in 1973. But still. How quaint. :)
- 2) The dialogue. Please. No one talks like that.
- 3) The fact that literally everyone Molly ran into, both in Florida and in New York, turned out to be gay (even her cousin?!). I wish that happened in real life. I want to have all the sex too, I mean. Come on.
- 4) Similarly, the ways in which everyone was just so polarized. There was no coming around on Carrie's part-- she remained a right wing asshole all the way through. The characters seemed really flat as a result of this.

So, yeah. Two stars for this book. Because I mostly really didn't like it (does this mean I'm going to have my queer card revoked?), but it had its moments. And I really wanted to like it. And that kept me reading until the end.

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### **Sam says**

Do you ever pick up a book and find yourself halfway through analyzing why this must have appealed to a number of people at one point? I mean, sure, but to have a book go DOWNHILL after that point seems like an exercise in mockery. I understand why this is important as an early lesbian novel but I'd happily sacrifice that value to never hear or know about this book again. Warnings for discussions/(endorsements?) of CSA and incest.

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### **Jesse says**

I can't say it's exactly to my tastes, but I quickly found it impossible not to give in to Molly Bolt's unflagging exuberance as she strides through her whirlwind life with gusto and verve, inevitably encountering a lot of people along the way. Many of these characters quickly become hung up on who Molly is, where she came from, what she stands for, and, more often than not, are bewildered by the very potent sexual effect she has on them. Molly, ever disappointed but nonplussed by the reactionary attitudes she inevitably encounters, in turn unveils how the moral and social values of these figures—and by extension society itself—is a confused and contradictory entity in its taboos and prejudices. As such, when young Molly declares in the first pages of the novel "it makes no difference where I came from. I'm here, ain't I?" it serves as a prophetic echo that resounds through the rest of the novel—not only in regards to Molly's attitude toward her own coming-of-age story, but as an emblem of the larger feminist and gay social movements of the 1960's and 70's.

For the "of its time" quality is at once a large part of its charm and the source of its most disquieting elements. For if the handling of some issues—most particularly race—leave a lot to be desired, the novel is also very prescient in its adamant eschewal of labels, particularly in regards to sexual identity, and anticipates by several decades the embracing of the term and concept of "queerness" within the LGBT community:

*"So now I wear this label 'Queer' emblazoned across my chest. Or I could always carve a scarlet 'L' on my forehead. Why does everyone have to put you in a box and nail the lid on it? I don't know what I am-- polymorphous and perverse... I'm me. That's all I am and all I want to be. Do I have to be something?"*

and

*"Why have you got to label everything?"*

While not unproblematic by any means (Molly's outspoken repulsion of butchness and the butch/femme dichotomy often comes off as mean-spirited rather than the pointed critique it was probably intended as), the avoidance of neat categorization creates a textual and sexual space for a character and a narrative that still, after all these years, remains singular and even remarkable in a number of ways.

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## Avery (Book Deviant) says

See more of my reviews on my blog the Book Deviant

I honestly don't know what to say about this book. *Rubyfruit Jungle* began in a way that I knew I would ultimately love. Molly, the protagonist, told stories about her childhood, which were hilarious, and I just couldn't get over how strong of a character and woman Molly was. As she grew older, Molly retained her fiery personality, no matter how her family reacted towards her. And, considering how much her adoptive mother hated her, I was pleasantly surprised when Molly didn't let her mother's words get her down. She was a strong character, and continued to be a strong character throughout the story.

But . . . It got weird at points. I don't mean a good weird either, I mean a very, very, bad weird.

These weird scenes didn't start happening until Molly made it to New York, but up until then I was greatly enjoying the story. Molly was a strong female character, who knew she was a lesbian and didn't care what others thought when she said she was a lesbian. At some point though, Molly got too intent on the fact that she was a lesbian, and practically forced it on others. She wanted to sleep with an older woman, and when the older woman resisted, Molly forced herself on her, until she submitted and had sex with Molly. After this happened, the book then framed this all as the older woman's fault, and as a personal problem to Molly.

Jumping off of that point, Molly eventually started sleeping with the daughter of that woman, who was apparently staring at her daughter in a way that made the daughter think her mom wanted to sleep with her. And then they started talking about incest, and what circumstances were okay. (They decided that if both parties were both consenting and over 15, incest was okay.) These scenes really turned me around, because despite Molly being a strong character . . . she was repulsive as a person.

Final Rating: ★★???

Overall?

I was really gearing up for this book to be something I enjoyed, for it to be something that was groundbreaking and that I wanted others to read. I ended up loathing this book, and the ideas that it promoted. I was so shocked when these scenes happened, that I almost didn't finish the book in time.

Would I Recommend?

Probably not. Maybe if you want to read historical queer novels, then go ahead, but TW for incest mention, rape, parental abuse, and death.

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## Conor says

This was our June book club pick. It won out over "Fun Home" and "A Brief History of Seven Killings," two of my absolute favorites, in our Pride-themed book club. I'm glad to have read this book because it was the only title I hadn't read, and also because lesbian literature is something I am realizing I'm woefully underexposed to.

This roman à clef stars a bright young woman in provincial Florida with designs on greatness. Common as a feature in queer youth lit (e.g., "The End of Eddy"), the protagonist nurtures her intelligence as an escape hatch from the conformity and stolidity of the repressive South. To the extent that she actually flaunted her

homosexuality in the 1960s South, I give this woman massive props. The New York stuff was all pretty conventional, decrepit, 1970s NYC stuff. We all agreed that the book oversold people's sexual suggestiveness and made sex the focal (end?) point of most entanglements with people. But we also agreed that the author had a fun voice, a charming story, and spun an interesting tale.

But seriously we polled the group on their knowledge of good lesbian fiction and most of us couldn't come up with more than one or two. My friend Alice recommended a lesbian steampunk novel called (exquisitely) "Fingersmith," but that's about the extent of my knowledge. Help me out with some suggestions, goodreads?

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### **Donna Davis says**

I read this book the year it was published. I was a young woman of 21, and it was during a time when it was still considered shocking, by most of mainstream straight America, to be gay. My sister had recently come out to me, and my head was spinning. We were very close, and she was much older. Her "roommate" of many years was not just a roommate any more. I wasn't sure what to think or feel. In short, I was confused as hell.

This book was a good antidote. Hilariously written, human, sexual, occasionally profane: it's hard to be a homophobe when you're laughing that hard.

Later that year, while Anita Bryant was still trying to "save our children" by getting gays and lesbians banned from any job involving children on the no-facts-involved notion that they would molest them, I went to my first Pride march in my sister's place. (She was a pediatric nurse, and terrified lest she lose her position; she is retired now). My mother turned on the evening news to see a close-up of a very young version of me, clad in a halter top and carrying a sign, chanting "Three, five, seven, nine, lesbians are MIGHTY FINE!"

Things are different now, and more people are probably open to reading a book like this, even when there are no humming-wire family issues involved. It did me a world of good. If you are lesbian, are in favor of gay rights but aren't sure if you are comfortable about actual lesbians--a lot of people have told me this over the years: 'it's a private matter, but I don't want to hear about it'-- or if you are not easily offended and just want to laugh, and laugh, and laugh, get this book. Read it now.

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### **Genna says**

One of the few books regarded as a "classic" of lesbian literature, Ruby Fruit Jungle bothered me. What begins as a not-too-bad lesbian coming of age story evolves into an anti-heterosexual, anti-motherhood manifesto. The plot and the writing suffer as a result, and my own disagreement with the message prevents me from enjoying the book.

I was able to find solace in regarding the book as something of a historical relic - a museum piece of sorts that illustrates well a particular philosophical era in the gay rights movement. I think we should read this book in much the same way we read "The White Man's Burden": as a piece of literature that contributes to our understanding of the thinking of the day.

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## **Kayla Perry says**

I really debated whether to give this one or two stars because my intense negative reaction to the book doesn't necessarily mean it wasn't written decently.

However, I definitely can't award it anything higher than a two because it was awful in many ways. Here's a list in no particular order why I dislike this novel:

1. Putting down butch lesbians by basically saying there's no point to them (Molly says she might as well be with a man) and also implying from the few she met that they are stupid and ugly.
2. Ageism. Granted, Molly does sleep with Polina towards the end but she puts down older lesbians frequently prior to that.
3. Rape. Molly is pissed at Polina (who is being judgmental for sure, but still doesn't condone the above action) and forces her to kiss her and then restrains her on the bed. Molly even admits she "half-forced" her into this encounter and dismisses Polina's objections by insisting she likes it, even if she initially acts like she hates it. If a dude did this in a novel I would be just as squicked out right now. It is never okay to force someone to have sex with you, I don't care how they're acting.
4. Approval of incest, with emphasis on parent and child. Later, when Molly is now sleeping with Polina's daughter, Alice, she says that she knows her mother wants to sleep with her but is too "repressed" to do so. What follows is Alice saying she doesn't think incest is that big of a trauma to which Molly replies that she doesn't understand why "parents and children put each other in these de-sexed categories. (It's) Anti-human, I think." As if that isn't disgusting enough on its own, she tries to cover her ass by adding that incest is only okay when both parties are consenting and over fifteen.

I guess the author thought herself very enlightened by suggesting incest is no big deal as long as everyone is onboard but I found that entire section disturbing as hell. Being a victim of incest myself I can only assume the author a) never had any experience with incest personally or b) did, but is so fucked up as a result that she thinks it permissible for parent and child to have sex together. I'll be the first to say that incest is a big deal and was very traumatic to me. I realize not everyone feels the same, but I think it's irresponsible and horrid to suggest that not having sex with relatives is somehow anti-human. So fuck you very much, Rita Mae Brown.

You know what? On second thought, I give this book one star. There is nothing within it that's redeemable enough to pardon the things above.

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## **Mauojenn ~ \*Mouthy Jenn\* ~ says**

The first few chapters I was laughing so much I was for sure I would be giving this book a high rating. It was a good book that I had not heard of before, thanks library book club. Molly Bolt is an steadfast character and while she just might be Brown living out her younger years, it wasn't the greatest, but still an enjoyable read.

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