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Ruby: A Novel



Synopsis

A New York Times bestseller and Oprah Book Club 2.0 selection, the epic, unforgettable story of a man determined to protect the woman he loves from the town desperate to destroy her. This beautiful and devastating debut heralds the arrival of a major new voice in fiction. *“Ephram Jennings has never forgotten the beautiful girl with the long braids running through the piney woods of Liberty, their small East Texas town. Young Ruby Bell, “the kind of pretty it hurt to look at,” has suffered beyond imagining, so as soon as she can, she flees suffocating Liberty for the bright pull of 1950s New York. Ruby quickly winds her way into the ripe center of the city—the darkened piano bars and hidden alleyways of the Village—all the while hoping for a glimpse of the red hair and green eyes of her mother. When a telegram from her cousin forces her to return home, thirty-year-old Ruby finds herself reliving the devastating violence of her girlhood. With the terrifying realization that she might not be strong enough to fight her way back out again, Ruby struggles to survive her memories of the town’s dark past. Meanwhile, Ephram must choose between loyalty to the sister who raised him and the chance for a life with the woman he has loved since he was a boy. Full of life, exquisitely written, and suffused with the pastoral beauty of the rural South, *Ruby* is a transcendent novel of passion and courage. This wondrous page-turner rushes through the red dust and gossip of Main Street, to the pit fire where men swill bootleg outside Bloom’s Juke, to Celia Jennings’s kitchen, where a cake is being made, yolk by yolk, that Ephram will use to try to begin again with Ruby. Utterly transfixing, with unforgettable characters, riveting suspense, and breathtaking, luminous prose, *Ruby* offers an unflinching portrait of man’s dark acts and the promise of the redemptive power of love.* Ruby was a finalist for the PEN America Robert Bingham Debut Novel Award, a Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers selection, and an Indie Next Pick.

Book Information

Audio CD

Publisher: Random House Audio; Unabridged edition (April 29, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0804165890

ISBN-13: 978-0804165891

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 1.1 x 5.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.8 out of 5 stars 994 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,280,513 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #126 in [Books > Books on CD > Literature & Fiction > Short Stories](#) #737 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > African American > Historical](#) #2251 in [Books > Books on CD > Literature & Fiction > Unabridged](#)

Customer Reviews

Starred Review Ephram Jennings, the son of a backwoods preacher, has been in love with the beautiful Ruby Bell ever since childhood. But Ruby has been so badly used by the men in her small African American town of Liberty, Texas, that she flees for New York City as soon as she is able, in search of the mother who abandoned her. When Ruby's best friend dies, Ruby returns home, only to succumb to the bad memories that haunt her still. Once sharply dressed and coiffed, she now wanders the streets with ripped clothing and vacant eyes. But Ephram still sees her as the lighthearted girl with pigtails, running free in the woods. And so he begins his long, sweet courtship, bringing her a homemade cake, cleaning her filthy house, and always treating her with kindness. At long last, out from under his overbearing sister's dominion, he feels himself come alive. But the church folks in town view their relationship as the work of the devil and seek to bring Ephram back to God and to cast out Ruby. In her first novel, Bond immerses readers in a fully realized world, one scarred by virulent racism and perverted rituals but also redeemed by love. Graphic in its descriptions of sexual violence and suffering, this powerful, explosive novel is, at times, difficult to read, presenting a stark, unflinching portrait of dark deeds and dark psyches. --Joanne Wilkinson --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

2016 Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction, Shortlist "Channeling the lyrical phantasmagoria of early Toni Morrison and the sexual and racial brutality of the 20th century east Texas, Cynthia Bond has created a moving and indelible portrait of a fallen woman... Bond traffics in extremely difficult subjects with a grace and bigheartedness that makes for an accomplished, enthralling read." •Thomas Chatterton Williams, San Francisco Chronicle "A beautifully wrought ghost story, a love story, a survival story...[A] wonderful debut." •Angela Flournoy, Los Angeles Review of Books "Reading Cynthia Bond's Ruby, you can't help but feel that one day this book will be considered a staple of our literature, a classic. Lush, deep, momentous, much like the people and landscape it describes, Ruby enchants not just with its powerful tale of lifelong quests and unrelenting love, but also with its exquisite language. It is a treasure of a book, one you won't soon forget." •Edwidge Danticat, author of *Claire of the Sea*

Light. “Pure magic. Every line gleams with vigor and sound and beauty. Ruby somehow manages to contain the darkness of racial conflict and cruelty, the persistence of memory, the physical darkness of the piney woods and strange elemental forces, and weld it together with bright seams of love, loyalty, friendship, laced with the petty comedies of small-town lives. Slow tragedies, sudden light. This stunning debut delivers and delivers and delivers.” —Janet Fitch, author of *White Oleander*

“Ruby is a harrowing, hallucinatory novel, a love story and a ghost story about one woman’s attempt to escape the legacy of violence in a small southern town. Cynthia Bond writes with a dazzling poetry that’s part William Faulkner, part Toni Morrison, yet entirely her own. Ruby is encircled by shadows, but incandescent with light.” —Anthony Marra, author of *A Constellation of Vital Phenomena*

“From the first sentence, Cynthia Bond’s unforgettable debut novel, *Ruby*, took hold of me and it hasn’t let go. Cynthia Bond has written a book everyone should read, about the power of love to overcome even the darkest of histories.” —Amy Greene, author of *Bloodroot*

“Bond proves to be a powerful literary force, a writer whose unflinching yet lyrical prose is reminiscent of Toni Morrison’s.” —*O, The Oprah Magazine*

“In *Ruby*, Bond has created a heroine worthy of the great female protagonists of Toni Morrison and Zora Neale Hurston. Bond’s style of writing is as magical as an East Texas sunrise.” —*Dallas Morning News*

“Evocative, affective and accomplished. Bond tells the story of Ruby and Ephram’s lives and their relationship with unflinching honesty and a surreal, haunting quality.” —*Texas Observer*

“Gorgeous. Bond is a gifted writer, powerful and nimble. It’s tempting to call up Toni Morrison or Alice Walker or Ntozake Shange. It should be done more as compliment than comparison, though. Bond’s is a robustly original voice.” —*Barnes and Noble Review*

“Oprah recommended this book to me, and it is astounding. [Cynthia Bond] has such a majestic command of language; she catapults everyday words into rare air with lines that sear into your memory. The characters Ruby and Ephraim shimmer with vibrancy • they show the complications of pain and joy, all messily and beautifully together. A total triumph.” —Ava DuVernay, director of *Selma*

“If you love well-written historical fiction and multifaceted grown-up characters, put *Ruby* at the top of your beach bag... Bond delivers multiple goods with this one.” —*Essence*

“Cynthia Bond creates a vibrant chorus of voices united by a common struggle. [T]he prose’s lyricism and *Ruby*’s interaction with the dead call to mind *Beloved*. While Bond’s characters may sense the

inevitability of loss and loneliness, they are also driven by something else, a timid hopefulness that they may find serenity and compassion amid the ghosts who haunt them. • The Rumpus • “Exquisite, juxtaposing horrific imagery with dreamy evocative lyricism. • Lambda Literary • “Literary magic. • St. Louis American • “Ruby explores the redeeming power of love in the face of horrific trauma | If the truth shall set us free, Ms. Bond shows us, in her story of grace, that love is truth. • “ [A] dark and redemptive beauty... Bond’s prose is evocative of Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, paying homage to the greats of Southern gothic literature. • Library Journal (starred) • “[A] powerful, explosive novel. Bond immerses readers in a fully realized world, one scarred by virulent racism and perverted rituals but also redeemed by love. • Booklist (starred) • “An unusual, rare and beautiful novel that is meant to be experienced as much as read. • Shelf Awareness (starred) • “A stunning debut. Ruby is unforgettable. • John Rechy, author of City of Night • “Cloaked in authenticity, Ruby is unlike anything else out there right now. • Windy City Times • “Impeccably crafted | Ruby is undoubtedly the early work of a master storyteller whose literary lyricism is nothing short of pitch perfect. • BookPage • “Bracing....Undeniable....The echoes of Alice Walker and Toni Morrison are clear....A very strong first novel that blends tough realism with the appealing strangeness of a fever dream. • Kirkus From the Hardcover edition.

This book was just too much for me! Too much pain, evil, rape and man’s inhumanity to woman , and worse, to little girls. The writing was beautiful. But, the book was a struggle to get through. I don’t recommend it.

This was difficult for me to read but impossible for me not to finish. My heart ached with the pain, degradation and sorrow that filled the pages. There was also the triumph of goodness and love. Its a moving well written story with richly developed characters. Ephriam and Ruby demonstrate vividly the power we each have to reject any false beliefs that trap us and triumph.

Beautiful and hopeful, but coming from tragedy. To say it is a love story would be such an understatement, but it is that, on many levels. The book is like a poem, lyrical and impressionistic, beautifully written but also drawing on the main character’s painful and tortured past - literally. (I

wonder if maybe it should also carry a warning of adult themes, especially concerning child abuse?).

I could not put this book down. I read it at glacial speed, first to understand the dialect with a little frustration and then to grasp the depth of the characters. My throat tightened, my eyes opened wide as my temples tightened...I felt pressure in my head...my heart sank...and my entire body continually shifted uncomfortably as I read and I felt great sadness, fear, pain, sexuality and then profound joy as Ruby realized that she would always be loved and that she realized that a lie could only control a person if they believed it. I loved that she realized that she wished she would have expressed to her 'children' that it was their birthright to rise.....I mean, this was a profound story of survival, deep love, and a certain knowing that is rarely expressed. I appreciate how raw the story was told. I admire Cynthia Bond's courage to put this on paper.

Beautiful beautiful. Horrifying. Supernatural. Blessed. I finished reading it, I'm going to begin reading it again. I've read that this is the first of a trilogy. I can hardly wait for the other two. I've never read such a wonderful book, I lived in it while I read it. Loved this book.

Cynthia Bond! Oprah said it best when she stated, through tears this is a holy work. Making me tear up now! A love story exploring (still existing) prejudices in the South.....I am going to order another (I have purchased several copies and given them away) and read it again.

I wish I could give this novel 100 stars. This is the most beautifully written book I have read in years. The words conjure up the most beautiful pictures and emotional warmth and angst at the same time. I want to know the kind of love Ephram feels for Ruby...if only for a day.

what an amazing read! Thank You Oprah

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