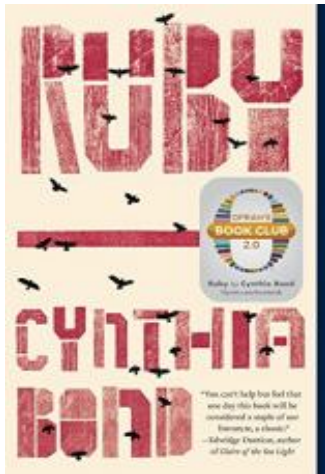


# Ruby

by Cynthia Bond



## About the Book

**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, "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, 30-year-old Ruby Bell 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.

## Discussion Guide

- 1.** How did Ruby's story change the way you view the world? What does the novel show us about the nature of trauma and the power of compassion?
- 2.** Celia copes with tragedy by putting her world in strict order, from her family life to her church life. But Ruby becomes lost to disorder. What accounts for their different approaches to emotional pain?
- 3.** At the heart of the novel is Ruby's vision of her children, and her vision of herself as a mother. How is she able to respond with a nurturing urge although no one nurtured her? Discuss the roles of mothers and fathers in Liberty.
- 4.** How did your understanding of the Dyboù shift throughout the novel?
- 5.** What protection do you think Ma Tante gives to young Maggie, Ruby and Ephram? Are they comforted by her powers, or does she only stoke their fears?
- 6.** What fuels the racism depicted in the novel? Do some of these factors persist today? Discuss Ruby's different experiences with racism in East Texas, New York City and on her trip back to Liberty.
- 7.** As you read the story of Ruby's aunt, how did you react to the notion that the past is still present? What does it take to overcome the Bell family's legacy?
- 8.** What role does Christianity play in Liberty? Does faith enhance or hinder Celia and her congregation in their attempts to heal Ruby? What does Ephram's baptism mean to him?
- 9.** Discuss the irony of the township's name. Is there any liberty for the novel's black characters there? How do their experiences compare to the freedoms and shackles Ruby encounters in New York?
- 10.** Otha Jennings and Ruby both lose their sanity as a result of Reverend Jennings's actions, while Chapter 20 reveals the Reverend's own tormented past. In the novel, how do women and men react differently to trauma? How are the expectations for Liberty's girls different from those for the boys?
- 11.** The author gives us vivid scenes of the night on which Ruby's fate was hinged. What were the Reverend's motivations that night? As you read the scene from the perspective of different characters, how did your perceptions change?
- 12.** Evoking the image of a precious gem, why is Ruby's name appropriate? Throughout her life, what is she taught about her beauty and her value?
- 13.** What common losses do Ruby and Ephram share, from childhood to adulthood? What opens their eyes to the possibility of peace? What do you predict for their future?
- 14.** Although Ruby is a work of fiction, the situations it describes are very much a reality. How can you and your community help protect the most vulnerable?

## Author Bio

Writer and educator Cynthia Bond has taught writing for over fifteen years. Cynthia attended Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, before moving to New York and attending the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. Cynthia acted for many years in New York with the Negro Ensemble Company. A PEN Rosenthal Fellow, Cynthia founded the Blackbird Writing Collective in 2011. At present, Bond works as a writing consultant and a workshop coordinator, teaching women, at-risk youth and working within the addiction recovery community. Her novel RUBY was published by Hogarth Press, a division of Random House, in April 2014. A native of East Texas, she lives in Los Angeles with her daughter.

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