

Rubyfruit Jungle Study Guide

Rubyfruit Jungle by Rita Mae Brown

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Plot Summary

The novel “Rubyfruit Jungle” by Rita Mae Brown tells the tale of a young girl as she struggles to find her own identity and face the realities of being a homosexual. The events of the novel unfold from the late 1940s to the late 1960s, a span of about twenty years. Brown depicts the struggle of the black citizens, women, as well as homosexuals. By giving a rounded view of the era, Brown is able to contextualize situations and experiences. The story is told through Molly Bolt, the main character. It begins when Molly relays the tale of how she first found out she was a bastard.

She was seven years old and living with her adopted parents in a poor town located in Pennsylvania. While walking home from school one day, she discovers that her friend Broccoli had a rather odd looking penis. She decided that they should make money off it by letting the school children take a look for five cents. Business is fine until a boy named Earl Stambach tells the teacher who in turn, tells the parents of Molly and Broccoli. When Molly gets home, her adopted mother Carrie begins to throw insults at her and tells her she is not her child, but the daughter of a woman named Ruby Drollinger.

Molly spends her childhood playing with her cousin Leroy. The two become extremely close and the bond continues to grow as they take revenge on Earl Stambach. Molly likes being around the boys and though Carrie calls her odd, she continues to do as she pleases. She is an intelligent child who stands out from the rest of her classmates in many ways. While playing nurse, Molly claims she will not let her gender stop her from being a doctor. At a young age, she is comfortable with her gender and is willing to fight for her rights.

Soon after the incident with Broccoli, Leroy’s mother, Jenna, has a baby who dies after two days. Jenna passes a few weeks later from cancer. Molly begs to stay with Leroy through the night after the funeral, but Carrie thinks it is wrong and doesn’t let her. Molly can’t sleep so she walks around the house and sees her dad hugging Leroy’s dad and thinks it is nice that men are allowed to hug sometimes.

As the years pass, Molly continues to hang out with boys and in the sixth grade, she has her first crush on a female classmate named Leota Bisland. The two become friends and Molly soon asks her if she will marry her. At first, Leota is shocked, but she considers the idea. The two begin to kiss in the woods after school and Leroy joins them soon after. Molly finds out her family will be moving to Florida and is upset to have to leave her girlfriend behind. On her last night in Coffee Hollow, Molly spends the night with Leota and they make love before saying goodbye.

Molly’s and Leroy’s families move to Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, where they find their life to be much different than it was in Pennsylvania. Molly quickly realizes she has to get good grades, wear nice cloths, and be funny in order to fit in. Leroy doesn’t do well in school and keeps falling behind. Leroy and Molly decide to have sex one day after he confesses to having sexual experiences with a man named Craig, but Molly doesn’t like



it as much as she did with Leota. As they continue to have sex, their relationship slowly falls apart because Leroy begins to demand control.

Their relationship breaks and they stop having sex. Instead, Molly has begun a friendship with a beautiful cheerleader named Carolyn and a girl named Connie. They are inseparable and do everything together. Connie and Molly begin playing pranks on their teachers and gain the respect of the school. One night while out drinking, they discover their married principal is having an affair with the dean. After this finding, they are bribed by the principal and the dean to keep the news quiet. The two girls rule the school, but Molly still has trouble at home. Carrie continues to argue with her and Carrie's sister Florence is no better. Carl improves his relationship with Molly and reveals how proud he is of her. Soon after, he dies of a heart attack.

During her senior year, Molly has an affair with Carolyn who becomes obsessed with Molly. She grows jealous when Molly spends time with Connie and Molly has to remind her she needs to back off. Carolyn asks Molly if she is sleeping with Connie and Connie discovers her two friends have been sleeping together. Carolyn refuses to acknowledge she is a lesbian and Connie feels Molly will rape her because she is a homosexual. Connie claims she can no longer be Molly's friend. The girls stop talking to each other.

Molly gets a full scholarship to the University of Florida where she befriends her roommate Faye who drinks too much. Faye discovers Molly is a lesbian and the two begin having sex together all the time, forgetting their other social obligations. When their secret is discovered, Molly is sent to a psychiatric clinic and Faye is taken out of school by her parents. Molly leaves the school and returns home, only to discover Carrie knows about her homosexuality and wants nothing more to do with her. Molly hitches rides to New York.

She spends her first nights in a car with a homeless homosexual man named Calvin who helps her discover New York. He decides to leave for California and Molly gets a small apartment. She also gets a job at The Flicker, a burger joint. There she meets Holly, a black lesbian who decides to work for The Flicker to get close to Molly.

Holly is a "kept woman" who is paid to be another woman's lover. She suggests Molly do the same and introduces her to Chryssa who wants Molly for her lover. Chryssa offers to pay for Molly to go to film school, but Molly cannot have sex with her just for the money. She decides she will get into school through her own hard work and dedication. She labors to win a scholarship from New York University and begins school. Molly's schedule becomes hectic with full time school and work. Holly, her new lover, is upset about the amount she has to work. After getting both herself and Molly fired from The Flicker, Holly grows angry with Molly for working so hard. She throws many insults at Molly, but finally realizes she is unhappy with her own life. She decides it would be best to leave Molly.

Molly finds another job at the Silver Publishing Company where she meets Polina Bellantoni, a middle aged professor with whom she is determined to have a relationship. The two become fast friends, but as soon as Polina finds out Molly is a lesbian, she



wants nothing more to do with her. Upset by Polina's treatment, Molly tries to find out more about Polina's lover, Paul. She thinks he is disgusting, but decides to go on a date with him to find out more. Before the date, Polina starts talking to Molly again and explores her bisexual side by having sex with her. After the first time, she does not want to stop. Molly doesn't like the affair because Polina always pretends to be a man. Molly discovers Paul likes to pretend he is a woman and that is why he and Polina enjoy sex together.

Molly starts having sex with Polina's daughter, Alice. When Polina finds out, she says she never wants to see Molly again. Molly escapes to her old hometown in Pennsylvania. She sees Leota again who looks much older than she is. Leota calls Molly sick for thinking about their sexual experience together and for being a lesbian. Molly leaves; happy she desires more in life than merely to be a bearer of children.

It is Molly's last semester at New York University and she decides to film Carrie for her final project. She travels to Ft. Lauderdale and discovers Carrie is suffering from cancer. Carrie is overjoyed to see Molly and denies ever saying Molly was not her child. For the week, Molly films her mother talking and rocking. Molly sees Leroy again who seems unhappy with his life and glad to see Molly. He is married and has two children. Right before Molly leaves for New York, Carrie reveals Molly's father was a Frenchman. She also tells Molly Carl cheated on her. As she leaves, Molly realizes how much she loves Carrie even with all her flaws.

Back at school, none of her classmates are impressed by Molly's film. She is the only woman in her department and is not shown respect because of it. Even though she graduates at the top of her class, Molly has a hard time finding a job in the movie industry. She vows to continue toward her goal of making films.



Part 1, Chapters 1-2

Summary

The narrator, Molly, begins telling her tale when she is seven years old. She relates she lives in a “rural dot” called Coffee Hollow and how she first found out she was a bastard. At the time, one of her friends and classmates was Brockhurst Detwiler, otherwise known as Broccoli. While walking home from school one day, he needed to pee and Molly saw his penis. She thought it looked odd because it still had the skin on it and freckles all around and decided that the two of them could make some money off it. Molly came up with the plan they should charge a nickel for the other kids in the school to see Broccoli’s penis. The plan works fine for about two weeks until Nancy asks to touch the penis and Broccoli agrees. Molly decides they should charge a dime for anyone who wants to touch it. They did well for a week until Earl Stambach decided to tell on them to their teacher.

When Molly got home that day, her “Mom”, Carrie Bolt, was furious with her. Carrie told Molly she was not her real mother and her real mother was a slut named Ruby Drollinger. Carrie throws out words like “ass”, “bitch”, and “bastard”. Molly tells Carrie if she isn’t her real mother, she doesn’t have the right to hit her and then she runs away to the woods. She decides she will stay there and starve, but quickly changes her mind when night falls. When she returns to the house, no one is up waiting for her. A few years later, at the age of eleven, Molly gets her revenge on Earl when she gives him a packet of raisins filled with a mixture of raisins and rabbit poop. Earl, who is called an idiot several times, eats the raisins quickly. Leroy, Molly’s cousin, begins laughing and tells Earl about the rabbit turds. Molly makes Earl promise never to tell on her again, but as she leaves Earl she does not feel good about what she has done.

Analysis

From the very beginning of the chapter, the language used by Brown makes the reader aware of the lack of innocence of the children living in Coffee Hollow. Molly uses derogatory words such as “dick” and “bastard” at the age of seven, something many parents would never allow their kids to do. Carrie Bolt encourages the language by using it to scold Molly. Rather than taking the time to talk to her adopted daughter, Carrie calls her names and treats her as though she is a peer rather than a child.

Molly is faced with an extremely harsh reality at a very young age when she is told Carrie is not her real mother. Carrie does not seem to care she may have deeply scarred her adopted daughter. She does not even wait up for her or go looking for her after Molly runs off to the woods.

This lack of authority leaves no guidance for Molly, causing her to use derogatory words and learn the ways of the world through experience rather than a positive role model.



Yet, Molly seems to understand good and bad; when she gives Earl the rabbit turds to eat, she does not feel satisfied because she is able to understand she did something wrong. Though Molly does not have much guidance in her life, her consciousness works as a trigger to let her know what actions are good and what actions are harmful to others.

Vocabulary

tarpapered, droned, iridescent, babbling, strapped, brownnosing, ratting, mealy-mouthed, perplexed



Part 1, Chapters 3-4

Summary

Ed, Leroy and Ted's father, comes home one day cut up from a knife fight. He has huge holes in his skin and is bleeding everywhere. Jennifer, his wife, asks him what happened and he tells her he got into a fight with a man named Layton who had been boasting about his son. After telling Ed his son got into West point, he went on to say Ed's kids could never get in to a school like that. At that, Ed grew furious and the two men began fighting. Jennifer, who is pregnant with another baby, looks old to Molly. When Carl, Molly's father comes home, they all gather to eat stew. Molly fights for a seat next to her "father". A few weeks later, Jennifer has the baby, but it only lives for two days. Molly overhears Ed talking to Carrie about his wife having cancer. Leroy hears it too and tells Molly he doesn't want his mother to die. A week later, Jennifer is dead and a funeral is held for her where Ed buys the best casket he can find. That night, Carrie refuses to let Molly stay with Ted and Leroy. In the middle of the night, Molly gets out of bed and sees Carl and Ed hugging in the living room. Ed is crying. Molly wonders when it is appropriate for two men to hold each other.

Molly and Leroy are playing nurse with Cheryl Spiegelglass, a girl Carrie claims to look like Shirley Temple, when Molly states she is the doctor. Cheryl disagrees and states only boys could be doctors. The two girls begin to argue until Molly hits Cheryl. Cheryl's mother says Molly can't visit for a week, but Molly is okay with that—she doesn't want to visit anyone who says she can't do what she wants. When she arrives home, Carrie has already heard the news and tells her she can't go out anymore. She also tells Leroy Molly is not her real child. Molly locks Carrie in the basement, but when she finally lets her out, Carrie hits her all over. Later that night, Carl and Carrie get into an argument over Molly. Carrie blames Carl for never giving her a child of her own and cursing Molly by suggesting she will never get a husband, while Carl tries to convince Carrie how bright Molly really is.

Analysis

The audience is made aware of Molly's caring nature within Chapter 3. When she hears news of Jennifer's sickness and tells Leroy, she tries to take care of him. After the funeral, she doesn't want to leave his side because she knows how hurt he is. The reader also gets a picture of what life is like in Molly's world. It is a place where death is viewed as an integral part of life; something that cannot be stopped or changed. The family accepts Jennifer's death as an unfortunate, but inevitable event.

Brown also brings up many gender roles within these two chapters. Cheryl has grown up with the idea that only boys can be doctors and Carrie always has a problem with Molly hanging out with the boys or sleeping in their room. Carrie also brings up the fact that Molly will never get a husband, something she considers being an essential part of



a woman's life. Carrie cannot grasp Molly's independent nature and free spirit because it does not fit in with her preconceived notion of what womanhood should be. She wants to punish Molly by keeping her in the house so she can teach her how to be a domestic girl rather than roaming around with the boys. Carl, on the other hand, sees Molly's spirit as an asset and believes it will help her achieve more than he or Carrie ever could.

Vocabulary

intervened, bandy, sheepish, robust, resolute, rigged, crinolines, moorings, rancor, tactical, traipsing



Part 1, Chapter 5 - Part 2, Chapter 6

Summary

Molly thinks Leota B. Bisland is the most beautiful girl she's ever seen. While trying to talk to her during class, Molly is caught by the teacher and sent to the hall where she peeps in and flicks the bird at Leroy. The teacher sees her and as punishment she is to be the Virgin Mary in the play. During the play, Cheryl begins reciting out of turn and Molly gets angry, finally pushing Cheryl off stage. Carrie makes Molly stay in the house all week and do chores. One day, Molly asks Leota to marry her and they start kissing. After that, they kiss every day after school in the woods. Leroy joins them after a while. Leroy and Molly are told they are moving to Florida. On the last night in Coffee Hollow, Molly and Leota have sex.

On the way to Florida, they stop in Athens, GA, to eat and take a bathroom break. Molly enters the "Colored Only" restroom and she is chastised by Carrie. Molly suggests her parents might have been black and she doesn't care what a person looks like—she will associate with whomever she wants. When they move to Florida, Molly quickly realizes the gap between the poor and wealthy is much wider in the new city of Ft. Lauderdale. She tries to fit in by making good grades, wearing some nice clothes, getting rid of her bad grammar, and becoming the funniest person in the school. Leroy begins to hang out with the motorcyclists so he won't be bullied. Leroy professes to Molly that he might be queer because he got "sucked off" by a guy named Craig and liked it. Molly states she doesn't care what he does, it's his business. She asks him if he's ever had sex with a girl and he says he has, but he didn't like it. Molly has never had sex with a boy, so Leroy suggests they do it together. When they do, Molly thinks Leota was much better, but suggests they do it occasionally.

Analysis

There have been hints in the previous chapters suggesting Molly might be attracted to her own sex, but that fact is plainly shown in chapter five when Leota becomes all Molly can think about. It is ironic Molly is made to play the role of the Virgin Mary in the school play and shortly after, she loses her virginity to Leota. Molly doesn't really understand what sex is and in the beginning of their relationship. Kissing is enough at first, but as their relationship progresses, she feels something more should happen. When Molly later has sex with Leroy, she compares it to the time with Leota and doesn't feel like anything can compare to her. Brown makes it clear even though Molly is willing to have sex with boys, she will never enjoy it as much as she would with a member of her own sex. She also depicts Molly's openness to Leroy being queer. Molly does not feel like it is anyone's business to know what Leroy is doing and she wonders how people could think badly of gay people for doing what feels right to them.



By giving Molly's insight on gay rights, Brown gives a firsthand perspective on how a lesbian or gay man would feel when chastised for doing what feels right to them. Brown draws the reader into the perspective by making the work a first person narrative in which the reader cannot escape Molly's thoughts. Brown also draws attention to the limited amount of rightscolored people held at the time. Things were not much better in the north, though there were no outward signs as there were in the south. Molly realizes it is not fair for people to be looked down upon merely because of their skin color and decides she will talk to anyone she wants to.

Vocabulary

bucking, antagonist, perplexity, aghast, warbled, imperious, dinky, mongrel, jalousie



Part 2, Chapters 7-8

Summary

Leroy flunks eighth grade and has to go to ninth grade twice. He starts acting like a jerk towards Molly and since Craig moved away, is firmly rooted in his heterosexuality. Molly doesn't have time to worry about him; she is busy with several extra-curricular activities and hangs out with her new friends Carolyn Simpson and Connie Pen. While reading the Aeneid in class, Molly is told the teacher always cries at a certain part. Connie and Molly decide to bring in onions and pretend to cry while the teacher is crying. They are praised for their sensitivity by the teacher and praised for their humor by their classmates. They continue to do pranks around the school, which gains them the respect of most of their classmates. One night, Connie, Molly, and Carolyn decide to go to a movie. Through the film, Molly can only look at the actress and begins to compare her to Carolyn. They get drunk afterwards and Connie and Molly tell Carolyn they are not virgins. On their way home, they see the principal and woman dean together. They are both married and don't want the news to spread, so they bribe Molly and Connie to make sure no one will find out. Molly feels bad and promises not to reveal the secret.

Leroy finally passes ninth grade after three years of being held back. He wonders what to say to girls and how life would be after marriage. Molly feels sorry for him and claims she will never get married. After being elected president of the student council, Carrie is upset because she doesn't believe governments, even student governments, should be run by women. They fight and Molly starts to take the car until Carrie states Carl needs it. Just then, Carl comes out and offers to take her for a drive. While there, Carl tells her to do whatever she wants in life because he never could and now that he is an old man, he regrets it. They grow closer, laughing and watching television together until he suddenly has a heart-attack and dies suddenly in the night. Carrie is depressed for months after and Molly can't help because all they do is fight. Molly doesn't cry over Carl's death at first, but one day, while putting on some coffee for him, she realizes he is no longer alive. She begins to cry, but tells Florence, Carrie's step-sister, she is crying because of the book. Florence tells Carrie her child is odd for crying over a book, but not the death of her father.

Analysis

Molly quickly learns the people of the world can only be won over through humor and trickery. She begins to appeal to both her teachers and classmates by simultaneously showing them what they want to see. She understands the teacher who cries over a section of the Aeneid wants to be respected for being sensitive and thus appeals to her sensitive nature by pretending to cry herself. At the same time, her other peers are aware they are fake tears and she is not made fun of for being too sensitive herself. As Connie and Molly move through their high school years, they continue committing such pranks to gain respect that will get them further with the teachers and students. By



discovering the principal and dean are having an affair, Molly and Connie quickly climb to the top of the student body and gain more opportunity than their peers. Throughout chapter 7, Brown depicts every system as corrupt and the corruption begins very early on.

In chapter 8, the audience is once again shown how much Carl cares about his adopted daughter. Even so, his sparse presence doesn't help Molly much. Yet, it is evident she looks up to him and genuinely cares about him more than anyone else in her household. Though he is never around, she wants him to be around and is well aware of the respect he has for her. He is the only adult figure that has ever encouraged her to be as she is. The fact that all the women in her life never showed her any respect probably pushed Molly to gain qualities that were considered more "manly" at the time. After Carl's sudden death, Molly is made aware of how quickly life can be taken away and how vital it is to live completely when given the chance. At first, Molly doesn't cry over her father's death because she has not fully accepted his death. It is only when she recognizes it that she begins to tear up.

Vocabulary

scrotum, androgen, hefty, irreverent, sultry, stentorian, irrefragable, dolt, philandering, harpies, fronds, upbraided, percolate



Part 2, Chapters 9-10

Summary

High school continues and Molly states that all three friends keep their boyfriends around more for convenience than anything else. Carolyn's boyfriend keeps bugging her to have sex with him and she promises she will if they win the big football game. They win and Carolyn has sex with him, but hates it. She asks Molly if it's like that every time. Molly tells her she will get used to it in time. Carolyn asks Molly to go drinking on Friday. They go to the park and Carolyn gets wasted and ends up having sex with Molly. They start sleeping together regularly and Carolyn begins to pay more attention to Molly than anyone else which causes tension between the trio of friends. Finally, Molly tries to calm Carolyn's behavior and in front of Connie, Carolyn asks if Molly is sleeping with Connie too. Connie finds out about Molly and Carolyn's affair together and calls them queer. Carolyn refuses to admit she is because she is too "feminine", but suggests Molly is queer. Molly grows angry and walks off; Connie follows, but tells Molly they can no longer be friends because she is afraid Molly will rape her. The three girls stop being friends and Molly falls into isolation.

Molly gets a scholarship to attend the University of Georgia. There she meets her roommate Faye and they both join sororities—Faye for her mother and Molly for the money. They grow close quickly and Molly realizes Faye is on her way to becoming an alcoholic. One night, Faye reveals she is pregnant and needs to get an abortion the next day. Molly goes with her and takes her back to the dorm after. That weekend, Faye wants to go to club hopping in Jacksonville and takes Molly to the gay bar. Faye claims she's not gay, but likes the scene. Molly admits she is when they return to Faye's home for the night. Faye convinces Molly to have sex with her and they start a relationship. Soon, everyone at the school stops talking to them and when Faye admits they are gay, Molly is sent to a psychiatric ward and Faye is taken away by her father. Molly is dropped from her sorority. The chapter ends with a letter to Molly from Faye telling her to go to the big city where things might be better.

Analysis

These two chapters explore the difficulties of being a lesbian in a world that does not accept anything that differs from the norm. All her life, Molly has been considered an anomaly and that does not change as she continues to grow. Carolyn finally gives in to her desire for Molly after experiencing sex with a male for the first time and not enjoying it. Carolyn refuses to call herself queer because she sees the label as a stigmatization yet she has no problem calling Molly a queer. Molly is offended by Carolyn's lack of understanding and her inability to accept herself as she truly is. Carolyn considers herself to be too "feminine" to be a dyke, depicting her ignorance. She has been brainwashed into believing that only masculine looking women can truly be considered



gay, even though she has been having sex with Molly for months. Molly is aware of the hypocritical view Carolyn has and therefore can no longer be friends with her.

Molly is further stigmatized by Connie when she professes her fear of Molly raping her. It is ridiculous to see Molly as a rapist, yet Connie is beginning to think in that way just because of Molly's choices in sexual partners. Brown displays how senseless the situation can become and how much of a reality it was and still is. The hatred continues when the dorm girls find out about Molly and Faye's relationship. It is eventually considered a disease by the college authorities as well as Faye's mother and father. By so thoroughly banning homosexuality in society, many choose to hide it rather than accept it. Carolyn chose to hide it because she knew she would no longer be accepted into the society she knew and loved. Brown pushes the reader to see how the societal stigmatization of homosexuality negatively affects the gay and lesbian communities and how hypocritical it can make people.

Vocabulary

condescended, overt, bolster, fuselage, emblazoned, polymorphous, constituency, ebbed, incriminating, pericardium, cretin, insipid, aberration



Part 3, Chapters 11-12

Summary

Molly leaves college and goes back home. When she arrives, Carrie tells her she knows what went on in the college and she knows Molly is queer. She tells her to leave immediately. Molly hitches a ride to Georgia with a small family and then up to New York with a boy named Ralph who studies at M.I.T. When she arrives in New York, she realizes how friendless, cold, and lonely the city is. She tries to find a place to spend the night and sees a car near the university that she climbs into. In the backseat of the car is Calvin, a homosexual man who shows Molly the city and takes care of her for the day. He knows a man who gets off by having grapefruit thrown at him by different people and pays \$100 for someone to do it. Molly agrees to go and gets some money. They then go to a bar in which Molly is introduced to the terms butch and femme, male and female roles for lesbians. She thinks the idea is pointless because the whole reason she is a lesbian is because she loves women, not women pretending to be men. That night, Calvin tells Molly how he was ostracized by his parents for being gay then got a girl pregnant. His parents wanted him to marry her, but he ran away. He decides to hitchhike to San Francisco the next day. Molly decides to find an apartment.

She finds an apartment by the river and finds a job at The Flicker, a restaurant Calvin had taken her to the day before, as a waitress. Still, she has no extra money to spend and what she does have, she spends at the club on the weekends. One day, a woman named Holly walks in to The Flicker and tells Molly to meet her after work. Molly does and soon after, Holly starts working at The Flicker to get close to Molly. Holly reveals she is being paid by an actress named Kim to have sex with her and that's how she got all her money. After a long night at the club, Holly and Molly have sex. Soon after, they attend a party where Kim asks Molly if she's in love with Holly and Molly replies she is not because they are too different. Holly is too interested in money and Molly doesn't care about that, but more about ambition. An old woman named Chryssa tries to hit on Molly and suggests she will even pay her school fees for film school if Molly sleeps with her. Molly agrees to go to lunch with her, but can't bear the thought of having sex with Chryssa, especially because she doesn't love her. She thinks that Chyrssa is no better than the construction workers who eye a piece of meat. Molly can't stop thinking about Carrie and what she would be doing.

Analysis

Even though Molly arrives in New York with next to nothing, she is still grounded in her morals and stands by what she believes in. Unlike Calvin, she can't hook up with someone just to get a room or some breakfast. She would rather find a way on her own, through her own hard work. She doesn't waste any time getting an apartment and a job because she knows those are the things that will help her through. Even though things



in her new apartment get boring, she does what she can to keep going. Holly is an unexpected surprise in Molly's life and adds a spark she had been missing.

Yet, Molly is aware Holly is not interested in the same things she is. Molly still holds on to the ambitions she had a child. She still wants to go to school and follow her dreams of being a film director, even though she has no means of doing it. She is also unwilling to get money in any corrupt way as Holly is doing. Molly goes to lunch with the woman to see if she would be able to go through with sleeping with her for money, but quickly realizes it is not in her nature. She believes in hard work and is willing to fight her own battle even if it is much harder.

Vocabulary

sauntered, ptomaine, filched, incidentals, ubiquitous, parquet, pretensions, sadist, proletariat, intoned, philistine, tedium, modulated



Part 3, Chapter 13 - Part 4, Chapter 14

Summary

After months of trying at entrance exams, Molly gets a tuition scholarship to attend school for film studies. She hardly ever has time after working full time and going to school. Holly is unhappy with the change. One night, a man grabs Holly's boob while she is working and she beats him up until the manager comes over and fires her. She exclaims that if she's fired she's taking her "wife" Molly with her. Both of them leave and go back to Molly's apartment where they begin to argue about Molly's career goals. Holly accuses Molly of hating bratty rich kids like her and working towards an unattainable goal. She claims Molly is like her father, always working, but never getting anywhere far. She asks Molly whether or not she loves her and Molly says she doesn't, making Holly even angrier. Finally, Holly apologizes and states she hates herself for being the way she is—with no goals or ambitions. She thinks spending some time away from Molly will clear her head and she leaves to do just that, claiming to love Molly as she leaves.

Molly gets a new job as a secretary at the Silver Publishing Company. When the bosses' wife takes notice of her skills, she is promoted to help the editor James Alder. The only problem with the job was a woman named Rhea who was in love with James and hated Molly because she believed Molly had taken James away from her. She proceeded to make Molly's life at work hell and the boss did not believe either Molly or James. Molly decided to take matters in her own hands and put piles of dog poop in all of Rhea's desk drawers. Rhea is furious when she finds it and instantly blames Molly. On her way out, she runs into Polina, a writer whose manuscript is being edited by Molly and James. Molly begins to work closely with Polina and one day, Polina invites Molly to eat dinner with her family. They have a good time and Polina and Molly's friendship begins to grow. One day, when Polina admits she wants to go dancing, Molly offers to take her to a lesbian club. Polina is surprised Molly knows about homosexual clubs and Molly reveals that she is gay. Polina leaves and Molly is deeply hurt. Molly wishes she could brush off people just as easily as they brush her off.

Analysis

Molly works hard to get back into school and continues to work hard after she gets in to make her own way. Holly doesn't understand why Molly just doesn't take the free money Chryssa offered her and make her life easier. Molly explains she can't do that. Holly takes offense because she wants to have a goal, an ambition to drive toward, but because she has always been given everything she doesn't think she can. She needs to get away from Molly because Molly's constant dedication to her dreams and goals keep reminding Holly what she isn't doing. When Molly claims she doesn't love Holly, Holly grows angry because in a life where she has gotten everything, she cannot accept that Molly doesn't love her.



At her new job, Molly finds grownups are not very much unlike school children when it comes to playing rough. Reminiscent of her childhood enemies, Rhea appears to make Molly's life miserable just because she has made an assumption about Molly's character without ever bothering to know her. Molly quickly realizes just like in her school days, that there are no easy fixes and she must the situation by herself. She puts the dog poop in Rhea's desk drawer to remind her that there are repercussions to being a mean person. When Molly meets Polina, she is excited to have a new friend, but quickly realizes her homosexuality will never be accepted by everyone.

Vocabulary

putrid, mottled, prude, decadent, renegade, corpuscles, abhorred, brusquely, laxity, blustered, impeccable, paunchy, cadence, ossified



Part 4, Chapters 15-16

Summary

Molly knows Polina has a lover named Paul Digita, a teacher of English at New York University. So while Polina isn't talking to her, Molly goes to see the guy in an effort to understand why Polina is into him. Paul looks terrible. He is crippled, has a mouth full of algae, and no good noticeably attractive qualities. Yet, Molly commends him on his lecture after class and he asks her to tea, which she agrees to. After a horrible tea at which he tells her everything about himself, he asks for another date which Molly again agrees to. Polina comes around before the second date and they go watch a movie together. Molly invites Polina over and after giving her some wine, drags Polina into bed with her. Polina wants to have sex, but she only gets turned on by imagining that she is a man. Molly is freaked out by the fantasies. Molly still wants to know what is so desirable about Paul, so she goes on a second date after which he practically jumps into Molly's crotch. He asks Molly where they are and pretends to be a woman. Molly quickly says goodbye.

Molly tries to end it with Polina, but Polina refuses to listen. More out of loneliness than anything else, Molly stays with her. One day, Polina's daughter Alice asks Molly to have sex with her. They become secret lovers until Polina finds out and tells Molly to leave for good. To escape, Molly goes to her old home town in Pennsylvania where she is amazed by the nature. She sits by a pond and thinks about how easy it must be to be a frog, completely free of worries. She wonders why humans consider themselves better than any other creature. After a while, she goes to visit Leota's old home where she is met with Mrs. Bisland, Leota's mother. Mrs. Bisland tells Molly Leota got married. Molly goes to visit her and notices Leota looks forty-five instead of twenty-four and already has two kids. Leota claims to love her husband and her life. When Molly asks Leota if she ever thinks about their night together, Leota grows angry and tells Molly she is sick. She questions Molly's life choices and tells her every woman has to settle down and marry a man at some point. Leota tells Molly she should be locked up, after which Molly grows furious and leaves to return to New York where she "can be more than [just] a breeder of the next generation."

Analysis

Molly goes on a date with Paul more out of curiosity than anything else. What she finds is shocking. Even though Polina was extremely homophobic at first, she is easily persuaded into having sex with Molly. After the first time, she can't seem to stop. What is more ironic is the fact she has strange quirks of her own. She needs to pretend to be a male in order to orgasm during sex. This transgendered fantasy shows that Polina has a problem with her own sexuality and is too afraid to confront it even in the most intimate of moments. Paul is the same way and that is why they are able to have sex



together. On the other hand, Molly is very comfortable with her sexuality. She doesn't need fantasies; the reality is good enough for her.

Molly does not seem to have many morals when it comes to sexuality. She is willing to have sex with a mother and a daughter with no regard for the feelings of either. Many times, Molly is very selfish in her sexuality. She wants to be with multiple people because she can't settle down with one person forever. Yet, many people desire that from her and her inability to give it leaves her alone and miserable. Yet, for her, the loneliness is better than ever settling for someone for the rest of her life. On the other side of the spectrum, Leota has never thought about being alone. Though she may not be very happy in her life, she is comfortable where she is. For her, anything that strays from what she considers to be normal is "sick" and disgusting. Leota pushes the memory of having sex with Molly out of her life because it does not fit into the mold that is expected from her. As she grows older, rather than moving away from the mold of expectation as Molly does, Leota gets stuck in it and can no longer see past it.

Vocabulary

languid, balked, myopic, protoplasm, bigot, sanctified, diatribe, napalm, geriatric, lethargy, pinnacle, acolytes



Part 4, Chapters 17-18

Summary

It's Molly's last semester at New York University and she has to shoot a twenty minute film for her final project. All the equipment is rented out to the boys in her class, so Molly just takes some and leaves for Florida. She arrives at her old house to find Carrie old and sick. Florence died a year earlier and Carrie has been alone since then. She talks about how Molly was always meant to be her child and Molly reminds her she once said Molly was no child of hers. Carrie disagrees and says she would never say such a thing. Molly spends the week in Ft. Lauderdale filming her mother as she sits on her rocking chair and talks ninety miles a minute. Leroy comes to visit. He has two kids and is married to a woman named Jenny. He asks Molly if she has ever been with any men after him and she says she has. He asks her if she has been with women and confesses he gets really bored in his life. He also reveal she joined the Marines and went to fight in Vietnam for a while. Soon, his wife comes back and they have to leave. He gives Molly a kiss on the cheek and leaves. On the morning Molly leaves for New York, Carrie reveals she and Carl couldn't have kids because he had syphilis. He also cheated on her because he claimed to love two people at the same time. Molly agrees with the notion of loving more than one person. Carrie also reveals Molly's father was a Frenchman.

When Molly returns to New York, she shows her film after all the rest. The one that got the most applause was a movie displaying a gang rape scene in a Martian landscape. During and after Molly's film, no one said a word and they all left quietly without saying anything to her. Molly graduated at the top of her class, but could not find a job making movies anywhere. The guy who made the gang rape film got hired for a children's show in CBS. Molly wishes she could be the frog she saw when she went back to her hometown. She wishes she could win a fight for women. She is determined to make films one day, no matter how long it takes.

Analysis

Even in Molly's last semester, she does not receive the same treatment as the boys in her class do. Brown depicts that even in the 1960s, sexism still existed and women were still treated as inferiors in school and job settings. The only way Molly can even finish her project is by simply taking the equipment without asking anyone. She films her mother to let her shine in a way she had always wanted to do. It is an act of kindness and forgiveness. When Molly returns home, Carrie asks for forgiveness by trying to take back the harsh words she said to Carrie while she was growing up. Through all of Carrie's flaws, Molly admits she loves her and Carrie admits her love for Molly. Now that Carrie is dying, she is finally able to forgive Molly for not being exactly what she wanted in a child. Molly accepts even though Carrie was not the best mother, she was the only mother Molly knew and that was enough.



Molly is the only woman in her class and none of the boys have ever spoken to her. Yet, a part of her expects them to say something in response to her film, but no one does. They pass her as though she does not exist, very openly displaying their sexism. Even the professor does not give her any regard. Brown further depicts the injustice of the world by showing what type of content received the most applause. It wasn't an inspirational film, or even a comedy. It was a gang-rape film that was filled with violence and breached morality in many ways. Later, the same boy who made that film is accepted into CBS as a children's show director. No one with any sense would want such a man directing their child's program, yet society chooses the people who walk on the edge of the obscene. Molly chooses not to display herself that way, and by doing the moral thing, she is put back once again. Yet, Molly never gives up on morality and hard work. Till the end she believes she will one day be able to achieve something wonderful.

Vocabulary

misogynist, treadle, degeneracy, vying, cohorts, reparations, squandering, abrasive



Characters

Molly Bolt

Molly Bolt is the protagonist of the novel. She is sharp-witted, determined, athletic, and beautiful. She is unapologetic for being gay and fights for her rights as a woman and a lesbian. She is extremely driven and works hard to get through life.

Carrie Bolt

Carrie Bolt is Molly's adopted mother who does not see eye to eye with Molly. She is extremely harsh on Molly as a child and continues to comment on her odd ways as Molly grows up. She does not like it when Molly hangs out with boys and thinks it is unholy for Molly to be a lesbian. Eventually, she is able to ask for forgiveness from Molly for being such a bad mother.

Leroy Denman

Leroy Denman is Molly's slow-witted cousin who is the son of Ep and Jenna. Leroy is Molly's childhood playmate and best friend, but they grow apart once they move to Florida and begin having sex. Leroy seems unsure of his sexuality while he is in high school, but marries at a young age.

Carl Bolt

Carl Bolt is Molly's adopted father who treats her like his own child. He lets Molly be who she is, but is never around because of work. He encourages Molly to live the life she desires. Carl is the only positive authority figure in Molly's life. He dies from a heart attack.

Holly

Holly is a beautiful, black lesbian that Molly meets while she is working at The Flicker. Holly is a "kept woman" who gets an allowance from an actress by having sex with her. She does not have any ambitions in her life and is used to living a luxurious lifestyle. She does not understand why Molly works so hard for what she desires. She becomes Molly's lover for a short time, but leaves when she faces her insecurities about her lack of ambition.



Faye Raider

Faye Raider is Molly's roommate at the University of Florida who becomes her lover shortly after. Faye was on her way to becoming an alcoholic when Molly first met her, but the addiction was curbed when the two girls became lovers. Faye is taken out of school when her parents find out she is a lesbian. She encourages Molly to go to the big city and fulfill her dreams.

Polina Bellatoni

Polina Bellatoni is a middle aged author who befriends Molly while Molly is editing one of her books. At first, she is homophobic, but eventually becomes Molly's lover. Polina is attractive even though she has a sixteen year old daughter. She is married and has another part time lover named Paul. Polina needs to live in a sexual fantasy of being a man in order to enjoy sex, a trait that repulses Molly.

Florence

Florence is Carrie's sister who lives with the family. She is extremely opinionated and self-righteous, but is able to take the lead during an emergency.

Carolyn Simpson

Carolyn Simpson is Molly's best friend and lover during her high school years. Carolyn claims that she is not a lesbian because she is too "feminine". She becomes obsessed with Molly after they have sex, but Molly doesn't forgive her for refusing to claim she is a lesbian.

Connie Pen

Connie Pen is Molly's other best friend during high school. Connie is a hefty girl who plays pranks on teachers with Molly. She is extremely boy crazy and cannot be friends with Molly once she finds out Molly is a lesbian.

Leota Bisland

Leota Bisland is Molly's first lover. Molly befriended Leota in the sixth grade and the two friends began kissing after school every day. On their last night together, they have sex. Years later, when Molly sees Leota again, Leota claims that Molly is sick and should be institutionalized for being a lesbian. Leota is married and has two children; she looks much older than twenty four when Molly sees her.



Ruby Drollinger

Ruby Drollinger is Molly's biological mother who Carrie states was a slut.

Jean-Pierre Bullete

Jean-Pierre Bullete is Molly's biological father who did not want to take responsibility for Molly.

Calvin

Calvin is a handsome homeless man Molly meets when she arrives in New York. She shares a car with him and he tells her how his parents tried to convince him to not be homosexual. He got a girl pregnant, but when faced with the reality of marriage, he escaped to New York. Calvin helps Molly get a little bit of money and free food while helping her get to know the streets of New York. He soon decides to go to California.

Jenna/Jennifer

Jenna, or Jennifer, is Leroy and Ted's mother. Jenna delivers a baby that dies after two days. She dies soon after from cancer, which she kept a secret until the last week of her life.

Ep

Ep is the father of Ted and Leroy. He is extremely upset when his wife Jenna dies and Molly spots Carl trying to comfort him.

Alice Bellatoni

Alice Bellatoni is the daughter of Polina Bellatoni who becomes one of Molly's lovers.

Chryssa

Chryssa is the woman who tries to convince Molly to be her "kept woman". They go out to lunch together, but Molly realizes she will never be able to go through with it.



Brockhurst Detwiler (Broccoli)

Brockhurst Detwiler, also called Broccoli, is Molly's childhood friend who had an ugly penis. Molly convinces him to put his penis on display for five cents. At first, he is nervous about doing so, but grows to enjoy it.

Paul Digita

Paul Digita is Polina's male lover who teaches English at New York University. He is an extremely boring person and does not look very good either. On Molly's search to discover what attracts Polina to Paul, she discovers he has sexual fantasies of being a woman while he is making love. This strange fantasy closely resembles Polina's.

Cheryl Spiegelglass

Cheryl Spiegelglass is Molly's childhood playmate who is said to resemble Shirley Temple. She is very feminine and does not understand how Molly can break her designated gender roles.

Earl Stambach

Earl Stambach is Molly's arch nemesis while she lives in Coffee Hollow. He tells on Molly and Broccoli for their business of showing off his penis. Molly soon gets her revenge by tricking him into eating rabbit poop.



Objects/Places

Coffee Hollow, Pennsylvania

Coffee Hollow is the town in which we are first introduced to Molly Bolt. This is a dirt poor rural town where the gaps between the lower class and upper class are not very wide. Molly returns to Coffee Hollow for a visit while she is living in New York.

Ft. Lauderdale, Florida

Ft. Lauderdale is where Molly's and Leroy's families move after Molly's sixth grade here. Here, the differences between the lower and upper class are much wider and Molly has to try to fit in with the wealthy kids.

University of Florida

The University of Florida is the school that Molly attends after high school. This is where she meets Faye and has a relationship with her.

New York

Molly escapes to New York after Carrie refuses to have a homosexual stay at her house. Molly discovers that the city has its good and bad. She spends the first nights with Calvin discovering the city.

Molly's New York Apartment

Molly finds a cheap apartment in New York. She has nothing more than a mattress she found on the street and some other odds and ends.

The Flicker

The Flicker is the burger joint that Calvin takes Molly to. She gets a job here after a few days in New York. This is also where she meets Holly who soon begins working there as well.

New York University

Molly works hard to get a scholarship to New York University so that she can fulfill her dream of being a film director. All of the students in the class are male and refuse to acknowledge her presence.



The Woods

The sexual exploitation of Broccoli's penis begins in the woods behind the school. It is also in the woods that Molly's kissing adventures with Leota occur. The forest is representative of Molly's sexual freedom. It is in the wood that she first learns about her sexuality.

The City

The city, from a distance, represents a place where Molly feels she will finally be able to be herself. Faye even advises Molly to escape to the city where things may be better for homosexuals. When Molly finally arrives, she discovers that the city is not all that it seems to be from afar. She has to struggle to find the opportunities and friends she thought she would readily have.

The Country

The country is where Molly spent the early years of her childhood. Brown depicts the strong juxtapositions between life in the country and the city. In the country, things are not as liberal as they are in the city, yet, it is in the country where Molly feels secure. Molly returns to the country when all her friends in New York abandon her.

Themes

Sexuality

Human nature and society tend to categorize everything in the world, especially in the pursuit of distinguishing things and people as both individuals and groups. Labels are also used on others whether it is true or not. In *Rubyfruit Jungle*, Molly's homosexuality as a lesbian is displayed in vivid detail, but there is more to her than just that one facet. She wants to be seen in her totality, she often echoes "I'm me" and "I'm here," she wants to be defined in more ways than just her sexuality. Molly eventually realizes her true identity already exists within and to prove it she'll have to listen to herself and fight against society's thoughts and actions.

The Exploitative Nature of Capitalism

The American capitalist system generates commerce by exploiting individuals. Brown analyzes this and makes it a point to be known and understood by his readers. As Molly gets older and starts working, first as a waitress and then a dancer, she has to wear costumes. She later notices she's become an object of sexual exploitation, the use of her body enticing customers to come in. In order to demonstrate this exploitation, Brown depicts how Molly began a business parading Broccoli's penis when she is just a little girl. Holly and Calvin's hustler occupations made women create the phenomena that sex sells. Brown criticizes what capitalism has brought upon individuals minds. The exploitation that Molly and Holly experienced brings out the gender inequality between men and women.

Acting

To show Molly's true identity, Brown uses role-playing and roles to show the struggles Molly faces. In her sixth-grade play, Molly was cast as the Virgin Mary in the production on the Nativity. As Carrie, Molly finds herself in the same position: a mother being forced to care for an illegitimate child. Cheryl, Molly's school rival, plays Joseph who Molly has to be in a fighting scene with brings out the same feeling Molly has at home when Carl and Carrie constantly argue.

After being hospitalized for lesbianism in college, Molly uses her amazing acting skills to convince the university psychiatrist how normal she had become and that she could handle society. This acting Molly performs doesn't end there; throughout her daily life she plays various phony roles because of her sexual identity. In matters of normal seeming behaviors and sex, Molly noticed that the trashy gay bars in New York were filled with lesbians who take on gender roles. Molly also notices there are "femme" lesbians who take on a woman's role by becoming the passive partner. Molly herself believes she too is more of a "femme." Through all these experience, Molly doesn't

completely believe in the roles in real life because of the limitations on an individual's character.



Style

Point of View

Rubyfruit Jungle is told from a first person, limited point of view. In this way, the audience is attuned to the main character's thoughts and ideas. This point of view also makes it easier for audiences to relate to Molly who is a homosexual. The reader becomes attuned to the fact that she is not much different from anyone else. Her homosexuality does not define her and she is still a very driven, intelligent woman. Audiences are able to share in her sorrows as well as her joys, which make her character much more rounded and easy to sympathize with.

Molly narrates the story in past tense, but in particular moments of great intensity, she shifts into the present to depict the strength of the emotion she feels or the beauty of a moment. These shifts to the present signify that though the events occurred in the past, they are very much still with her. The present tense changes bring the events to life by making them much more immediate and to the point.

Setting

Rubyfruit Jungle is set in many parts of the United States. Molly travels from Coffee Hollow Pennsylvania, to Ft. Lauderdale, to the University of Florida and finally to New York. Her story takes place from the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s, a span of nearly twenty years. The novel begins when Molly is seven years old and ends when she is nearly twenty-five.

Language and Meaning

Brown begins the story in a coarse prose that strongly resembles how the dialect would have been in the rural country of Pennsylvania. She uses many derogatory words to relay the hard life Molly lives. As Molly moves to Ft. Lauderdale, Brown begins to use language that is less derogatory and a little more formal. The formality in language continues to increase as Molly moves further and further away from Coffee Hollow. Brown uses language to match the city, or state Molly finds herself in.

Structure

Rubyfruit Jungle is divided by into four sections that are further divided into chapters that chronicle Molly's life. Each section begins and ends when important changes occur in Molly's life. The entire work follows Molly's thoughts of her adventurous, lonely, and confusing life.



Quotes

No one remembers her beginnings. Mothers and aunts tell us about infancy and early childhood, hoping we won't forget the past when they had total control over our lives and secretly praying that because of it, we'll include them in our future. (Chapter 1)

I'd never seen men hold each other. I thought the only things they were allowed to do was shake hands or fight. (Chapter 3)

After the storm, the sky stayed dark but across the horizon was a brilliant rainbow. [...] Leroy bet me I couldn't find a pot of gold at the end, and I told him that was stupid because the rainbow was enough. (Chapter 3)

I don't care whether they like me or not. Everybody's stupid, that's what I think. I care if I like me, that's what I truly care about. (Chapter 4)

Learn from your old man. I never did a goddamned thing and now I'm too old to do anything. (Chapter 8)

A whole human life is gone. A wonderful, laughing life and all that's left is this handful of used-up goods, and they're not even quality stuff. (Chapter 8)

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. Shit. I don't even know if I'm white. I'm me. That's all I am and all I want to be. Do I have to be something? (Chapter 9)

Oh well, maybe the only beauty left in cities is in the oil slicks on the road and maybe there isn't any beauty left in the people who live in these places. (Chapter 15)

Whoever heard of a neurotic frog? Where do humans get off thinking they're the pinnacle of evolution? (Chapter 16)

I wished I could be that frog back at Ep's old pond. 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. (Chapter 18)



Topics for Discussion

Topic 1

Why does Carolyn insist on claiming she is not a lesbian even after she has made love to Molly?

Topic 2

How does Brown try to incorporate important historical occurrences during the 1950s and 1960s into her novel? Give examples from the work to support your answer.

Topic 3

Is Molly characteristic of a radical feminist? Why or why not?

Topic 4

Why does Carrie refuse to accept Molly as her child? What sort of child would Carrie prefer? Molly does not cry at Carl's funeral, yet when she does shed some tears over his death, she chooses to hide them from Florence and Carrie. Why?

Topic 5

Describe Brown's depiction of the country as a place where Molly feels safe. How and why is that comfort shattered?