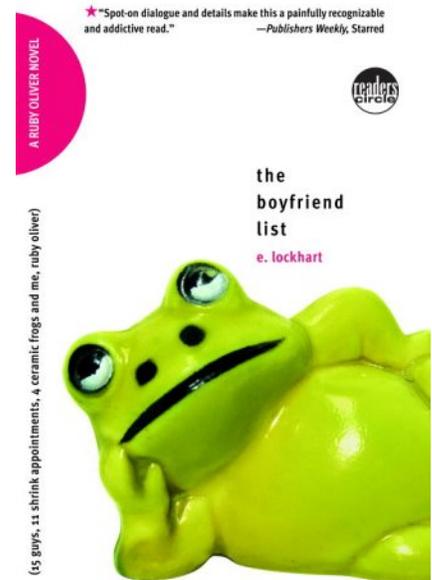


## 2011 Book #4: The Boyfriend List by E. Lockhart



I am so not the right audience for this book.

I've seen the Ruby Oliver quartet recommended by multiple YA authors I like, so I picked up the first book. And then I put it down. And picked it up again. And sighed. And put it down. Rinse and repeat until the last page.

Roo is a fun narrator. She's quirky, opinionated, secretive, and prone to tangents, and I adored her little footnotes. She's also a deeply flawed character, which I liked. Thing is, I didn't buy into the story she's telling.

Every boy she's had any sort of romantic entanglement with, real or imaginary, is covered in detail in this book. The story interjected between items on the Boyfriend List she's assembled for her therapist, though, is how she became the school pariah after she was caught kissing her best friend's boyfriend (her own ex). Roo has to sort out her own feelings re: boys in general, figure out how to control the panic attacks she's been having, and fix her fractured social life.

I can see why so many people love these books. Really, I can. Roo is awesome. The characters are well fleshed out. There's some genuinely hilarious stuff in here, accompanied by a whole lot of heart.

But I can't buy into Roo's story, and here's why: I don't feel the stakes, because compared to my real-life high school experience, her tumultuous life is a step *up*. My bitter inner fifteen-year-old was

having a pissing contest with Ruby Oliver all through the book.

Roo: "I was so embarrassed that I hadn't kissed anyone until I was thirteen and a half." (Actual quote.)

Bitter Inner 15-year-old: "I don't get to kiss anybody until I'm almost nineteen."

Roo: "All my friends have stopped talking to me. Except that one girl who's kinda weird. And that other friend who still sort of talks to me."

Bitter Inner 15-year-old: "All my friends have either moved away or become giant druggies. Except my English teacher."

Roo: "School kinda sucks. Not that my classmates at my small private school, like, bully me or anything. But only one guy's asked me out, and I have to sit with the seniors at lunch."

Bitter Inner 15-year-old: "I spent a good chunk of the last couple of years staying home 'sick' so I wouldn't have to face the bullies who were making my life a living hell, and now I eat my lunch in the art room. I've never dated anyone, and my mom's having a not-so-secret freakout thinking I'm a lesbian."

Roo: ...

Bitter Inner 15-year-old: ...

Roo: "I kissed my best friend's boyfriend and now everyone's mad at me but it's totally not my fault because I'm all naive and boy drama is hard."

Bitter Inner 15-year-old: "BITCH, PLEASE." \*returns to angrily eating a peanut butter sandwich in the art room\*

Usually I'm able to sympathize with characters whose experiences are very different from my own, but in this case, it didn't work for me. Every reader comes into a story with their own set of biases. Mine smells like peanut butter sandwiches and refuses to suspend its disbelief for Ruby Oliver.

**Writing lesson learned:** Yes, you CAN do footnotes in fiction and make it work! Lockhart uses this tactic brilliantly - it illustrates Ruby's obsessive nature and highlights the elements of her voice that really work. Also, voice! Roo's voice is very conversational and meandering, and she actually addresses the reader at times. If you're looking for good examples of voice in YA fiction that taps on the fourth wall, check this out.

**You might like this book if you enjoy...** Books about characters who obsess over boy drama like

**Theo Nicole Lorenz**

writer, artist, coloring book tycoon

<http://nicolelorenz.com>

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OMG LIFE OVER and then learn the lesson that OMG LIFE *NOT* OVER. In all sincerity, this is a valuable story to have told. And E. Lockhart tells it well. Girls whose lives are steeped in boy drama and people who once lived a similar experience will identify with Roo and probably adore her, because let's face it, she's pretty adorable.

**Would I recommend this to friends?** I read the "I hadn't kissed anyone until I was thirteen and a half" line aloud to my roommate and she yelled back at me, "*WHAT.*" So, no. I'm thinking not.