



***Jack of Hearts (and other parts)* by L.C. Rosen**

Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2018

ISBN: 9780316480512

\*Age Range: 14 & up (suggested by publisher)

Grade Range: Gr 10+ (Recommended by *School Library Journal*)

## BOOK SYNOPSIS

**Riverdale meets Love, Simon in this modern, fresh, YA debut about an unapologetically queer teen working to uncover a blackmailer threatening him back into the closet.**

Jack has a lot of sex--and he's not ashamed of it. While he's sometimes ostracized, and gossip constantly rages about his sex life, Jack always believes that "it could be worse."

But then, the worse unexpectedly strikes: When Jack starts writing a teen sex advice column for an online site, he begins to receive creepy and threatening love letters that attempt to force Jack to curb his sexuality and personality. Now it's up to Jack and his best friends to uncover the stalker--before their love becomes dangerous.

Ground-breaking and page-turning, *Jack of Hearts (and other parts)* celebrates the freedom to be oneself, especially in the face of adversity.

## REVIEWS AND PRAISE

★ An essential addition to library collections that serve teens. —*School Library Journal*, starred review

★ "This is a bold, inclusive exploration of teen sexuality that, propelled by Jack's brazen voice, never feels preachy...Fresh, sex-positive, and unabashedly entertaining." —*Booklist*, starred review

"A sex-positive and thoughtful romp with humor and heart."-*Kirkus*

"*Jack of Hearts* might be the most important queer novel of the decade." -*The Gay Times*

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“Whip-smart...humane, sex-positive writing of the funniest...and most heartening kind.”-*The Guardian*

"Told in a ferociously original voice, this subversive and defiantly queer ode to living your truth as an act of resistance arrives right on time."—Caleb Roehrig, author of *Last Seen Leaving* and *White Rabbit*

"Unapologetically honest, refreshingly bold, and gloriously celebratory, being proud of who you are never felt so good. I loved this book."—Simon James Green, author of *Noah Can't Even* and *Noah Could Never*

"This is the sex-positive gay YA novel of your dreams, starring one of the most authentic and lovable YA characters ever. Warm, funny, and incredibly sexy, Jack of Hearts totally has my heart."—Cale Dietrich, author of *The Love Interest*

"Bold. Unfiltered. Supportive. Funny. Boundary-shattering. There aren't enough words for how much I loved Jack of Hearts, but if I could sum it up in one, it would be: necessary. Put this book in the hands of every teen who needs the courage to find comfort in their skin and desires (or lack thereof)."—Dahlia Adler, author of *Under the Lights*

## AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

- A 2019 ALA Rainbow List Top Ten Title
- Guardian’s Best Books of the Year
- Barnes and Noble Favorite YA of 2018
- Booklist Top 10 Crime Fiction for Youth
- Book riot Best of the Month

## MEDIA AND RESOURCES

- [Book Club Guide](#)
- [L. C. Rosen on JACK OF HEARTS \(AND OTHER PARTS\)](#)
- [LC Rosen Dishes The Dirt On Jack Of Hearts \(And Other Parts\)](#)

## RESPONSE TO CHALLENGES

[National Coalition Against Censorship letter to Wilson County School Board](#)

[Adventures in Censorship: Jack of Hearts \(and other parts\)](#): “Jack clearly has social importance in that it provides important, scientifically based, sex educational advice to kids, in addition to being an important story about sex-positivity generally.”

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[Kent School Board votes against removing novel with LGBTQ+ characters from middle school library – Seattle Times](#): “I’m a big believer that one parent shouldn’t decide what all students get to read.”

## **AUTHOR STATEMENT**

### [Statement on Banning Jack of Hearts \(and other parts\)](#)

I understand there have been complaints about my young adult novel *Jack of Hearts (and other parts)*, and a small but vocal group of people wants it removed from schools and libraries. There are strong opinions on both sides, and the community is divided over it. I’m so sorry to see that - these things are daunting. Everyone – including me – wants what’s best for teenagers. It’s why I wrote the book to begin with. I knew it would be controversial, but I also knew it was needed.

*Jack of Hearts* follows out and proud Jack Rothman, a high school junior in New York City. He has an active sex life, as many teenagers do, but being queer, and going to a small school, his sex life is often a big part of the rumor mill, and so, to reclaim his own narrative and set the record straight, Jack agrees to write a sex advice column on his friend’s blog. This gets him a stalker who tries to convince him he shouldn’t be having sex, that he should be acting differently, that he should be the “right” kind of queer person. The stalker blackmails and harasses him while Jack and his friends try to uncover them.

Throughout the novel, Jack’s sex advice column appears. These feature questions and answers about a variety of sexual topics. I consulted with sex educators on all of these. And, importantly, all but two of the questions (which I made up for narrative purposes) are sourced from real teens from around the country. These columns are what most people are upset about. And I understand – no one wants to think of their child as a sexual being, or if they must, they don’t want to think of the details of their sexual desires. But sex is part of our culture now. In a 2012 study, over 90% of men and 60% of women had viewed pornography before they were eighteen. *Fifty Shades of Grey* was turned into multiple movies and is a cultural touchstone. Threesomes are on network television dramas. Teenagers know about sex, they talk about it, they’re figuring out what they want and don’t want. And *Jack of Hearts (and other parts)* was written to tell them that what they want or don’t want is normal and natural and they can act on it safely and consensually.

The book itself contains no sex scenes. There's plenty of discussion of sex, but any moments when Jack actually has sex are fade to black moments, which is significantly less sex than many straight young adult books which notably haven’t been challenged. And every time a scene in the book opens after sex, there is mention of condoms. Additionally, Jack himself offers advice to teenagers who have no interest in sex, telling them that it’s normal, and “*as long as everyone is consenting, there’s nothing wrong with your desire, or your not having desire. We’re all wired differently.*” This is a book which places emphasis on consent, and not having sex before you feel ready - and what feeling ready might be.

Sex education, even in the most liberal schools in the country, seldom touches on queer sex, which means most queer teens go into their first sexual experiences with only pornography as a guide, which is

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not what it's made for, and not ideal. I wrote *Jack* to not only give queer teens a reflection of themselves that was messy and complicated (as most teenagers are) but to give them real advice.

As I said, we all want what's best for these kids. But parents who don't want teens to see queer teenagers in books taking control of their sexuality, who don't want any teenagers to take control of their sexuality – they're trying to put the cork in a bottle that shattered years ago. We've been having these conversations for decades – they tried to ban Judy Blume, too. Limiting the choices teenagers have when learning about sex have shown time and time again to only result in more unplanned teen pregnancies and more STIs.

Putting blinders on and hoping your kids won't know about sex just because a book like *Jack of Hearts* has been removed from the library isn't going to help. They still have the internet, easy access to pornography, not to mention their friends, TV, movies. Taking away a book like *Jack* actually ends up hurting kids more in the exact way that people who want to ban *Jack* are trying to prevent. We're all on the same side – we want teenagers to make safe, personal choices and feel empowered to do so. Banning this book, telling them it's too adult, or wrong, will only make them feel ashamed. Especially queer kids.

And the queer community – all of us once queer kids – has been incredibly supportive. The *Gay Times* said *Jack of Hearts (and other parts)* “might be the most important queer novel of the decade,” and the American Library Association Rainbow List named it as a top ten book of the year.

I trust teenagers. They're the best at self-censoring. This book was not part of the school curriculum. It was simply in the library. If a teenager picked it up and started reading it and felt uncomfortable, they easily could have put it down again. What's important is that they have that choice, so that the teens who need these books can find them. Reading books about queer people will not make a teenager queer (if that were the case, queer people like me who grew up reading books about straight people would be straight). Reading books about sex won't make teenagers want to have sex. Books educate, entertain and comfort. Many studies have shown that the most notable aspect of reading fiction is developing empathy – not wanting to do the things characters do in books, but understanding why those characters, and people like them, might want to do them – or understanding what it's like to be queer, to be Black, to be Indigenous or to be a person of color.

And I think it's important to again draw attention to the fact that these parents are primarily targeting books with BIPOC and queer characters (often without much sex at all), when in fact there are many many more young adult books with straight sex scenes that are far more graphic. We also now know that over 60% of the challenges to these books come from only eleven people in the country, and they're working off shared lists. So to me, the important questions to ask are where did these lists of books come from? Why exclude these voices in particular? Who is distributing this list, and what might their agenda be? Using fear to manipulate parents who care for their children is despicable, but it happens all the time. In this case it's to censor, to remove choices, to make sure that teens who need these books won't have access to them, and to give people a reason to vote for someone - someone who will save their children, when they were the ones who manufactured the need to save these

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children in the first place. *Jack of Hearts* had been on shelves for years before someone tried to ban it - it had been reviewed and put on best of the year lists when it first came out, and no one cared then. I find it curious that only now do people want it gone.

So I'd encourage parents to look beyond their shock and reluctance to acknowledge that their teens have sexual desires and instead ask themselves – how can we help them? How can we teach them that if they're going to act on their desires, they do so safely? *Jack of Hearts* was written to teach them that. So how can parents who think that's important make sure that these kids continue to have the choice to read these books? How do we make sure voices aren't excluded? The answer is to show up to school board meetings and insist on choice - the choice for kids to read, to hear stories, to learn about different perspectives. The choice to become more empathetic, and more kind.

I think the best people to speak with would be the teens themselves. Find teenagers who read *Jack of Hearts* before this controversy. Find out what it meant to them. Some might have just put it down. But others, especially queer teens, have found it empowering.

### **\*A NOTE ON AGE RANGES**

A publisher-suggested age range covers the gamut of readers that publishers envision using the book, whether for independent reading, family sharing, group study, or in other ways. Educators have the best sense of the appropriate age range for the diverse learners they work with and understand these ranges vary depending on a book's intended use.

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