

Book Bag



■ A LANDLORD'S TALE

By Gammy L. Singer
Dafina Books

The New York City village of Harlem has gone through many different phases since the very moment it was populated by working-class folks during the first quarter of the 20th Century.

Without a doubt it has always been one of the city's most prominent cultural hot spots, but it has certainly seen its share of ups-and-downs. From being a vibrant area full of jazz clubs, art galleries and pristine brownstones at the height of its renaissance to being an ignored and dilapidated 'hood during the crime and drug epidemics of the '70s and '80s, Harlem is currently at a crossroads where landlords can bank on its current cultural resurgence (or to some, gentrification and displacement) despite ongoing problems they may face. Amos Brown, a new landlord of two 128th street brownstones, is stuck in this situation, while also dealing with his own personal demons.

Amos is a good guy at heart and though he'd never get himself mixed up in drugs or violent crime, his unfortunate gambling problem has made him cross the path of notorious West Indian drug lord Harry the Monkey Chaser. Amos owes Harry enough money to put his life at risk, which caused his wife of only six months to walk out on him. However, his recently deceased father — who Amos met only once in his life — left him two brownstones. He should be able to make his money in no time, but things aren't all that easy as readers are introduced to his various tenants. From a flamboyant Texan to a teenage mother who can barely afford rent, they're a truly endearing group that'll make you remember to pay your landlord on time next month — because they're people too!

■ CRIMINAL MINDED

By Tracy Brown
Griffin/St. Martin's Press

As criminals-turned-rappers grow in popularity through out the United States, so does the fascination with their way of life. Drugs, violence, sex and money all seem to run hand-in-hand when it comes to radio-friendly rap. 50 Cent used to deal and got shot-up and loves to glorify it — just look at how well he's done! Well, fact is, when people lead that sort of lifestyle, there's going to be consequences and such consequences are rarely discussed in the music you'll hear on the radio — it's just too negative! With *Criminal Minded*, Tracy Brown weaves a tale of two guys who experienced the hard knocks of life, growing up in New York City during the '80s. They choose crime and their story is told — warts and all.

Lamin and Zion both had it hard — Lamin got into the drug game as a teen and Zion grew up in a foster care and prison system before becoming a professional criminal. Together they start a drug empire. Lamin makes the mistake of falling in love and nearly costs himself his life as a result. He makes the move to the entertainment industry, but Zion is unwilling to give up his hustler lifestyle and in the end, after a plot that involves extortion and murder, someone will have to suffer the consequences. If rappers aren't willing to tell the full story, you better believe that others will.

■ IF IT AIN'T ONE THING

By Cheryl Robinson
New American Library

Sometimes misery works like a magnet or a balloon that's been frantically rubbed on carpet and statically charged to stick to a wall. Like a magnet to metal or that balloon to a wall, misery tends to latch on to things. In the case of Detroit residents Porter Washington and Winona Fairchild, their misery has found each other.

Porter is a Detroit firefighter who recently broke up with his girl after discovering that her baby wasn't his. He's got a nosy mom, bills to pay and women find him fine so he's constantly in the midst of women he much rather not deal with. Winona lives with her own misery. She's got two children from different men, her father won't let her live down her life's mistakes and has a secret that could potentially destroy her currently decent life. Through plenty of snappy, witty dialogue and surprising plot twists, these two individuals meet up and must put their misery aside if they want their relationship to blossom in the Motor City.

■ LIFE LESSONS FOR MY SISTERS

By Natasha Munson
Hyperion

Girls, are you "searching for life blessed with peace and happiness?" Unless you're one of those gloom-and-doom types who'd rather witness the arrival of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse rather than live your life full of joy, chances are you tend to second-guess your life decisions, wondering if you've taken the better path. Ladies, you're in luck! Natasha Munson has all the answers in this "inspirational guidebook and valuable resource for women who want to live a more meaningful life."

Natasha was once a young sister herself and bases her knowledge on her own life's ups-and-downs. Full of poems, essays and an entertaining, conversational prose, Natasha covers all the bases to help a sister get a jump-start on her new life. From finding the ideal man and building confidence to education and faith, Munson uses her own life as lessons for the reader. Though, there's one thing that is sort of ironic — she dedicates an entire chapter to *not* listening to other's opinions in a book that is essentially chock full of 'em.

■ THE KEYSTONE

By Anita J. Moore
Dorrance Publishing

By now, we all know the basic history of America during the '60s and '70s. There was war and a Civil Rights movement, minorities were still being shafted and the United States was being turned upside down in the process. In *The Keystone*, we take a look at this vital period of America's past through the eyes of author Anita J. Moore.

Moore experienced these events first-hand as a teenager growing up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and used to get scaffolded at by her ten children as she'd repeat her stories as a means to teach them right from wrong. Finally taking the time to get her life down on paper, this mostly autobiographical work covers not only the social changes going on in this country at the time, but the changes Moore faced personally. As a young black woman she entered the Civil Rights movement by first by testing the waters of the Nation of Islam and then joining the Black Panther Party. Sure, you may have heard this story plenty of times before, but the truth is, no matter how many times it's told, it never gets old. **BB**

