

# African-American and Urban Fiction Roundup

By Hattie H. Vines and LaSaundra Vines

This year, book clubs can look forward to a great selection that has hit the market in 2007. Many selections are by first-time authors who have done a superb job with their debut novels.

Bryant, Niobia. *Live and Learn*. New York: Dafina Books, 2007. 273 pp. ISBN 0-7582-1720-X, \$14.00 (pb).

*Live and Learn* initially seems like something that has been hashed and rehashed, but the story of Moet, Alize, Dom, and Cristal is richer and deeper than expected. Though the four have all chosen different paths (stripping, working, and education) that lead out of the ghetto, their love for one another helps them stay together through drug addiction, abuse, abortion, and failed dreams. Realizing that their teenage dreams do not quite line up with the reality of their choices, the friends are forced to reevaluate who they are, what they want, and the best and safest way to get it. Bryant does an excellent job of telling their story of personal growth, heartache, and survival. This title is best suited for young adult book clubs and large libraries.

D. *Got*. New York: Akashic Books, 2007. 172 pp. ISBN 1-933354-16-3, \$13.95 (pb).

After literally being caught with his pants down and getting robbed of the bosses' cash for the night, the narrator realizes he is in a race for his life. Orphaned, he returns to committing crimes to help supplement his college dreams, and the change from student to criminal is instant and complete. He returns to a life he left behind for college and to friends who almost died with him as a teen.

*Got* is a fast-paced, constantly changing tale of a young man's survival in the dangerous underworld of gangs, drugs, and crime. The story leaps to life, and in an instant readers are enmeshed in the thoughts and actions of the characters, anticipating what's next. This book is best suited for teens and young adults.

Dawes, Kwame. *She's Gone*. New York: Akashic Books, 2007. 340 pp. ISBN 1-933354-18-6, \$15.95 (pb).

Kofi, a Jamaican Reggae musician, is on the tail end of a U.S. tour when Keisha, a social worker from South Carolina, walks onto the dance floor at the concert. Kofi is smitten immediately and walks her home, where he convinces her to follow him to Jamaica. She takes a leave from her job and goes with him. What she enters is not the land of sunshine and blue seas, and Keisha

experiences a severe case of culture shock. The people are separated by politics and class, and Keisha begins to feel like a stranger in an even stranger environment. Kofi suffers a bout of depression that Keisha cannot pull him out of. This amazing love story starts in the South, spans New York and the Caribbean, and is a history lesson in ways and customs, music, cuisine, and the beauty of the Island. A great read!

Dow, Candice. *A Hire Love*. New York: Dafina Books, 2007. 275 pp. ISBN 0-7582-1938-5, \$14.00 (pb).

Romance editor Fatima Mayo has spent three years in mourning after the death of her husband Derrick. Derrick was the love of her life, but now the time has come for her to move on. Her friend Mya works in the movie industry and suggests a dating service to meet men who are compatible. When Fatima doesn't find Mr. Right, Mya jokingly suggests that she write her own script for the perfect lover. Fatima does exactly that and meets handsome Rashad Watkins. Rashad has dreams of finding the right break to make it big as an actor. When he falls for Fatima (who is his boss and paying his salary), he must then prove that he is not playing the role of a lifetime.

Hairston, Alex. *She Creeps*. New York: Dafina Books, 2007. 307 pp. ISBN 0-7582-1882-6, \$15.00 (pb).

Naomi Gaffney was eight years old the day she and her sister came home to find the police and her mother's dead body. Her mother was white, promiscuous, and loved to sneak around at night with her secret lovers. Her father, a black policeman, was the prime suspect in the murder. When they took her father away, Naomi and her sister were sent to live with their religiously domineering aunt. Naomi married early to escape her horrible living situation, and she took her sister to live with her.

When she meets a handsome tow truck driver, Naomi comes alive. She finds that she just might be too much like the mother she lost so long ago. This book grabs your interest immediately, then becomes bogged down with too much meaningless dialogue between husband and wife. Fortunately, it picks back up and keeps the reader's interest the rest of the way through. More time should have been spent revealing the lives of the aunts. Nevertheless, it is an excellent read that book clubs will devour!

Jasper, Kenji. *Snow*. New York: Vibe Street Lit, 2007. 147 pp. ISBN 1-60183-001-7, \$9.95 (pb).

Eight-year-old Snow was a good kid who grew up on the mean streets of D.C. with his single mother, who struggled to keep him on the right path. Loved by everyone, Snow was especially close to Mr. Seasons, the father figure he never had and the neighbor who befriended him and let him play with his Atari. When gang members kill Mr. Seasons just to steal the game, Snow is the only witness. This is a turning point in Snow's life. When his mother leaves town to take care of her mother, Snow starts hanging with the wrong crowd. Now a grown man with a wife and baby daughter, he is still working the streets and will do whatever it takes to take care of his family.

What is unusual about the story is that Snow still has a heart even though he is a criminal. The author keeps us from seeing Snow as a true criminal, and we want to keep him safe during his escapades. This is a short, violent, yet touching story representative of the lives and struggles of many young black males today.

Lovely, Lutishia. *Sex in the Sanctuary*. New York: Dafina Books, 2004, 2007. 343 pp. ISBN 0-7582-1751-X, \$15.00 (pb).

The church's First Lady Vivian Montgomery has it all: a beautiful home, a husband who loves her dearly, and two wonderful children. Vivian works hard on church programs and helps all the ladies in the congregation stay on course. Her best friend Tai is also a First Lady, whose philandering husband just cannot be faithful. Tai remains with him through the affairs and spends her time looking for signs of the next affair. Extremely popular with her husband's congregation, Tai is fearlessly protected by her mother-in-law until she finds the strength within to stand up for herself. Meanwhile, back at Vivian's church, one handsome male in the congregation is chased by all the ladies and is being stalked by one of them. A true page-turner, the ending will amaze readers and keep them wanting more.

Moore, Stephanie Perry. *Chasing Faith*. New York: Dafina Books, 2007. 294 pp. ISBN 0-7582-1865-6, \$14.00 (pb).

FBI agent Christian Ware needs a change of scenery after her involvement in an affair with a coworker. This is a rebound relationship, just because she needs someone to hold on to after her boyfriend dumps her. She applies for a temporary job with the Secret Service, where she is assigned the job of protecting a presidential candidate, the Reverend Steve Stokes. When she meets the candidate's younger son, she wishes that he will become the love of her life, but his mother has other plans for him. The reappearance of her ex-boyfriend sets off a chain of events that leads Christian to examine who she is. A wild, streetwise younger sister with a drug-dealing, much older boyfriend, an ex-drug-addict mother, and a best friend who needs her help all add to the drama. In addition to its great story line, readers will be thrilled to learn something of the workings of various federal agencies.

Rivera, Jeff. *Forever My Lady*. New York: Warner Books, 2004, 2007. 260 pp. ISBN 0-446-69881-8, \$13.99 (pb).

Dio and Jennifer fell in love as teens despite coming from neighborhoods and families that aren't always conducive to loving relationships. Jennifer makes her choices out of necessity, and Dio submerges himself in the culture of his Hispanic/Latino community. They comforted each other as teens and understood the struggles each other faced. When they meet again as adults, they both feel as if they have never been apart. Both still want to succeed in life and must make changes in their lives. They plan to do so, but in life, even the best-laid plans often go to ruin. Jennifer is wounded in a shooting, and Dio is sent to prison boot camp. As life and reality set in for the two lovers, they must face the consequences of their actions.

Tyree, Omar. *The Last Street Novel*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007. 401 pp. ISBN 1-4165-4184-4, \$24.00.

Tyree returns and dazzles his fans with a story unlike any previously told. When author Shareef Crawford returns to his beloved Harlem on a book tour, he is approached about telling the story of the underworld that has always existed there. He imagines himself chronicling the stories of small- and big-time drug dealers, showing the various lifestyles in all their pain and glory. As Shareef digs deeper into a tale that many do not want told, he quickly realizes that these are not fictional characters, but real-life people with guns and the ability to kill him. While his professional and personal life both seem destined to crash and burn, Shareef tries to maintain the values taught to him by his grandparents. He rediscovers love with his wife and remains true to the streets he used his writing ability as a catalyst to leave. Though sometimes harsh, this book would be an excellent read for book clubs and library collections.

Ward, Pam. *Want Some, Get Some*. New York: Dafina Books, 2007. 357 pp. ISBN 0-7582-1775-7, \$14.00 (pb).

Ward tells an urban tale of crime from Trudy's point of view. Trudy has been wronged by everyone she has tried to love. Her mom puts her out of the house because she's worried Trudy will steal the man she stole from his wife. Li'l Steve pursues Trudy, then convinces her she should become a movie star. As he sells homemade videos of Trudy, she's forced to see that he didn't love her either. The disrespect Trudy receives at the hands of her family and the people in her neighborhood creates the need for revenge. Trudy dives headfirst into plans that could harm the few people in her life that have supported her. As Ray Ray, Vernita, and her Aunt Pearl try to protect Trudy from herself, she is caught up in a whirlwind of death, crime, and lies. Even though the majority of the characters are criminals, Ward does a great job of evoking a sense of compassion for them.

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