

I have an unusual way of determining a book's popularity. Perhaps I'm not supposed to tell you about it. But those books that frequently disappear from our shelves – without being checked out – show that some people feel particularly attached to them. *While this is not the way we'd like you to enjoy our books*, I bring it up because the author of the books I want to tell you about today shows just such attachment. Of the fifty holdings of her books we have in our library system, 13 of 50 come up as 'missing' or 'lost.'

Some might say that's the type of thing 13-year old Raspberry Hill, the hero of Sharon G. Flake's books *Money Hungry* and *Begging for Change*, would do. Raspberry is so preoccupied with money that people are always labeling her as 'greedy,' 'cheap,' 'desperate,' 'lame,' and 'selfish.' Raspberry just thinks folks are always bound to think the worst. But it is true Raspberry is always on the hunt for earning more money. She carries a calculator with her. She takes all sorts of jobs – selling year-old discounted Valentine's Day chocolate; pens and pencils; carrying groceries, working the cash at the car wash, or cleaning older people's houses. Some turn up their noses at the things she does. Saying she might as well be selling 'body parts.'

But they don't understand where Raspberry comes from. She lives at the top of the hill, and they say the neighbourhood was put up there to keep the people that live there from coming down. People who live in nice places don't want them to come and visit their neighbourhood, let alone move there. Even her friends don't understand: like Zora, who gets \$150 a month for allowance and has different contact lenses coloured for every day of the week. She's never tasted Kool-Aid without sugar. It's gross.

Raspberry lives with only her mom, and hates their home. Kids pee in the hallway, saying they're killing bugs, but she knows they're just having a contest. Neighbours play music and talk loud outside all night, and are threatening when asked to move along or quiet down. Her mother keeps all the windows nailed shut – even in the summer – to keep her safe. But they have been in worse places than they are now. Places with no roof, or with friends and family that eventually start hinting...that its time to go. That's why she always needs to be ready, needs money, because people can do whatever they want to you if you don't have money. She feels without money you're nothing.

Her mom works so many jobs that she never gets to see her anymore, only in their broken-down car on the way to school. Her mother's been changing lately too. She's dating again, and taking courses at the university. People say she tries to act rich: changing the way she speaks to talk 'proper,' becoming head of the tenant clean-up committee and planting flowers in the yard like they live in the suburbs. Raspberry's so frustrated that she isn't speaking to her. But her mom doesn't even notice. She wonders how many jobs her mother needs for them to get their own place. Too many, I guess.

Raspberry's friends even help her out on jobs sometimes (she cuts them in), but they do it to buy things, like new sneakers. But Raspberry, she never spends her money. She watches it, counts it, smells it, loves it. Instead of sheep, she uses it to count herself to sleep at night. She hides it all over her room, keeping it away from other people as much as she can. Because she's learned that people don't always pay you back, and that when people borrow – or take – your money, you don't always know, or they can't tell you, what they're using it for.

People say Raspberry will do anything for money, but it's not true. She'd never do anything *wrong*, nothing *bad* for money. People call her a lot of things, but it really makes her mad when they call her a thief. She's no thief. When she's done something wrong, she makes it right again.

This book was listed as 'missing,' but when I went to the shelf it was there, back again. So, like Raspberry, whoever had it, made it right. So maybe it is the type of thing Raspberry Hill would do.

You can read either of the two books first without spoiling the other. If you like these books, or want to start with another of Sharon G. Flake's books, you could try these:

The Skin I'm In – her first book

Who Am I Without Him? – a collection of short stories

Bang! – her latest