



Using What You Got: A Novel

Karen E. Quinones Miller

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"In" Using What You Got," Karen E. Quinones Miller returns to her beloved Harlem to spin a dynamic tale that sparkles with the blush of first love and the hard-won lessons that endure." "Eighteen-year-old college student Tiara Bynum" is as pretty as a princess and just as spoiled. Her castle is the Harlem housing project where she lives with her younger sister, Jo-Jo, and her doting father, Reggie. Her fiefdom is the legion of men at her beck and call every time she snaps her perfectly manicured fingers. She has no qualms about flaunting her charms to get what she wants because she's "got it like that."

Reggie -- a former professional gambler who was abandoned by his wife -- would do anything for his daughters, even if it means jeopardizing the family finances in favor of his girls' material happiness. Though Reggie's sister, Charlene -- a woman embittered by a disfiguring car accident -- pleads for restraint, her Thursday "family nights" pale in comparison to Reggie's Knicks tickets and shopping sprees.

Blissfully unaware of the recklessness of her father's splurges, Tiara believes she's the toast of the world. Her greatest goal is to find a rich, handsome man who will spoil her just as much as he does -- or maybe even more. "Go for the glitter," she urges herself. "Who cares if it's gold?" When two suitors arrive on the scene, Tiara prepares to be smitten. But when the one she secretly adores doesn't like her attitude, Tiara's trademark confidence frays into embarrassment, shame, and confusion.

Blindly determined to strike out on her own at any cost, Tiara lashes out against those who love her most. Yet the choices she makes, based on the way she's been raised, threaten to destroy not only Tiara, but her entire family.

Using What You Got: A Novel Details

Date : Published July 1st 2003 by Simon & Schuster

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Author : Karen E. Quinones Miller

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From Reader Review Using What You Got: A Novel for online ebook

Patrice Sartor says

The quality of the writing makes up for the predictability of the plot. I enjoyed the characters, and the pace of the story was just right.

GENRE: Fiction: Urban fiction, realistic fiction, problem solving.

SUBJECT/THEMES: Self improvement, greed, narcissism, ethical issues, personal growth, self-discovery.

SUMMARY: Tiara wants to nab the best man she can, get out of the projects, and prove to the young females still in the projects that they can be like her. The problem is, for Tiara, a good man is one that has lots of money, looks good, and will spoil her. Throughout the story, Tiara discovers what she really wants, and learns more about herself in the process.

EVALUATION: This was the first urban fiction book I've read, and I can understand the appeal. I found the book somewhat predictable, though that did not detract from my enjoyment. Tiara, her father and aunt, her male friends and her girlfriends all comprise very strong character roles, and I especially liked seeing how Tiara changed at the end of the story, for her greed and selfishness were becoming unbearable. This book had some language, some violence, and some alluding to sex (but no descriptions), yet was still shelved in the adult section of my library.

WHY I WOULD INCLUDE IT: It was easy to read, and written in such a natural manner that would appeal to urban youth that talk the same way the characters do, and understand the situations the characters deal with. This is a good example of urban fiction that does not need to be excessively graphic in order to have appeal and a message.

ITEMS WITH SIMILAR APPEAL:

- Bad Girls, by Shannon Holmes.
- Satin Nights, by Karen Quiones Miller.
- The Coldest Winter Ever: A Novel, by Sister Souljah.
- A Do Right Man, by Omar Tyree.

Marci says

good book, the begining of reading her books

Nardsbaby Reader says

This book was okay, I didn't love it

I was happy that the selfish young girl learned her lesson. This is more of a coming of age story maybe a lesson that younger girls could learn from. A lot of people spoil their children in the attempt to keep them from straying don't realize what a bad effect it will be as well. They are always looking to be validated by material things. This book was okay, I didn't love it, I was happy that the selfish young girl learned her lesson. This is more of a coming of age story maybe a lesson that younger girls could learn from. A lot of people spoil their children in the attempt to keep them from straying don't realize what a bad effect it will be as well. They are always looking to be validated by material things.

The main character in this book Tiara, was superficial and senseless she believed everyone around her was jealous of her because she had nice things, and was going to college. Apparently she wasn't as smart as she thought she hooked up with Lionel a spoiled rich young fake thug drug dealer and didn't know it! She met a guy Rashad who drove a cab who wouldn't be bothered and of course he was jealous of her. The title was using what you got, all she ever said was "she got it like that!" I sure couldn't tell. People flossing coach and prada living in the projects, shoot spend that money to get you some bricks of your own!

Kesha says

I actually stopped reading this book because I did not like the main character, Tiara. Glad I started back because it was good. I think its more Young Adult than Adult. Loved Reggie, the dad, and Charlene, the aunt. You can't go wrong with family like those.

Dee says

I read this book a very long while ago and still think about it from time to time.

Jennifer says

I wanted to give up on this book numerous times because Tiara would have me fuming with her fucking attitude. Just extra All. The. Time. Miller's writing did not wow me at all but I was interested in seeing what was going to bring Tiara down a rung or three.

Cheryl Durham says

Using What You Got was a quick read. Miller penned a work that depicted the challenges of a young girl coming of age in Harlem. Tiara, the main character, is very intelligent and beautiful on the outside but limited in her abilities to see worth in others. She attends City College with the aspirations of attending law school. She meets up with a young man who has all of the outside charms that she finds attractive (looks, a nice ride and money). He also had a means, whether legal or not, that ensured that the material things could continue to be at his hand.

Along with her sister, Tiara, was the apple of her father's eye. There is nothing that he wouldn't do for his girls. He proved that over and over again, so he thought, by never denying them anything. Their mother had walked out on them 12 years ago and he did not want them to ever hurt again. He had support from his sister when it came to the girls. Reggie had never placed limits on the girls. He stated he had raised Tiara to look for a "thoroughbred" and therefore, those with limited or average means were not worthy of her.

Her aunt was a phenomenal lady. Prior to an accident she was known to be a beautiful lady. She devoted a great deal of time to ensuring that the girls had a solid female figure in their lives. She would, when necessary, go toe-to-toe with Tiara and remind her that she had a great deal of growing up to do and that nothing was free. She was the epitome of discipline and support...and helped her niece to see with her heart as opposed to with her eyes.

Reggie, the father, in encouraging her to seek the very best, neglected to let her know that everything that glittered wasn't gold. Because of her inability to see beyond what was present...she would make a poor choice that would prove to be as devastating for her and possibly for her father.

In the end, the very ones that she slighted, "the average ones," with snide remarks and punches, are the ones that were there for her. In the end, the "average ones," as her father would come to know, were more than worthy. Tiara's family of origin and friends (Rashad and Alice) would help her to see that beauty is more than skin deep. Using what you got....may mean that sometimes we have to hear the ugly truth...the ugly truth can be costly...but it can also richly reward.

Note: Because of the profanity utilized in the book...it should only be read by mature readers or those with parental permission.

Pat says

Contemporary African American fiction.
Very simplistic and predictable.
Self absorbed 18 year old.
Fighting, swearing, treat each other badly.

Glenda says

The book was ok. I struggled with Tiara. She really just didn't get it. Aunt Charlene was my favorite character in the book.

Autumn Johnson says

Was a very quick read, wish there had been more backstory and less predictability. The ending was also sort of stale but overall a good read.

Chivon says

I liked the father and the aunt in this book. I could not stand the main character and I think that is why I could only rate the story with two stars. The writing however, was not bad. And the main character comes around at the end of the story.
