

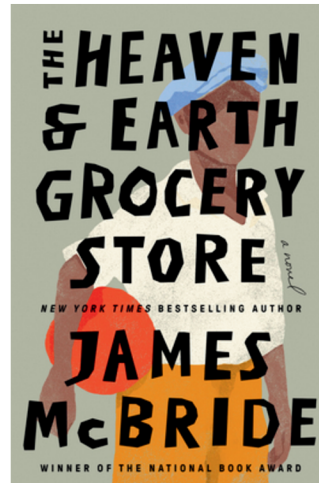
Heaven and Earth Grocery Store

by James McBride

In 1972, when workers in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, were digging the foundations for a new housing development, the last thing they expected to uncover was a human skeleton. Who the skeleton was and how it got buried there were just two of the long-held secrets that had been kept for decades by the residents of Chicken Hill, the dilapidated neighborhood where immigrant Jews and African Americans lived side by side, sharing ambitions and sorrows.

Chicken Hill was where Moshe and Chona Ludlow lived when Chona ran the Heaven & Earth Grocery Store, which served the neighborhood's quirky collection of blacks and European immigrants, helped by her husband, Moshe, a Romanian-born theater owner who integrated the town's first dance hall. When the state came looking for a deaf black child, claiming that the boy needed to be institutionalized, Chicken Hill's residents—roused by Chona's kindness and the courage of a local black worker named Nate Timblin—banded together to keep the boy safe.

As the novel unfolds, it becomes clear how much the people of Chicken Hill have to struggle to survive at the margins of white Christian America and how damaging bigotry, hypocrisy, and deceit can be to a community. When the truth is revealed about the skeleton, the boy, and the part the town's establishment played in both, McBride shows that it is love and community—heaven and earth—that ultimately sustain us.



About the Author

Michael Finkel is also the author of the New York Times bestseller "The Stranger in the Woods: The Extraordinary Story of the Last True Hermit," about a highly intelligent man who lived alone in the forest of Maine for 27 years, as well as the book "True Story," about Finkel's bizarre and unhealthy friendship with a murderer, which was adapted into a 2015 major motion picture produced by Brad Pitt and starring James Franco and Jonah Hill. Finkel has reported from more than fifty countries across six continents, covering topics ranging from the world's last hunter-gatherer tribes to conflicts in Afghanistan and Israel to the international black market in human organs to theoretical physics. In the line of reportorial duty, Finkel has skied off the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro, set sail on a Haitian refugee boat, joined a cult in Colorado, been in a car that was run over by a tank in Afghanistan, climbed into an active volcano in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and crossed the Sahara Desert on the back of an open truck. His work has appeared in National Geographic, GQ, The Atlantic, Esquire, Rolling Stone, Vanity Fair, and The New York Times Magazine. He lives with his family in western Montana and southern France.



About the Author

James McBride is an award-winning author, musician, and screenwriter. His landmark memoir, *The Color of Water*, published in 1996, has sold millions of copies and spent more than two years on the New York Times bestseller list. Considered an American classic, it is read in schools and universities across the United States.

His debut novel, *Miracle at St. Anna*, was turned into a 2008 film by Oscar-winning writer and director Spike Lee, with a script written by McBride. His 2013 novel, *The Good Lord Bird*, about American abolitionist John Brown, won the National Book Award for Fiction and will be a Showtime limited series in fall 2020 starring Ethan Hawke.

McBride has been a staff writer for *The Boston Globe*, *People Magazine*, and *The Washington Post*, and his work has appeared in *Essence*, *Rolling Stone*, and *The New York Times*. His 2007 National Geographic story "Hip Hop Planet" is considered an important examination of African American music and culture.

A noted musician and composer, McBride has toured as a saxophonist sideman with jazz legend Jimmy Scott, among other musicians. He has written songs for Anita Baker, Grover Washington Jr., Pura Fé, Gary Burton, and even for the PBS television character "Barney." (He did not write the "I Love You" song for Barney, but he wishes he did.) He received the Stephen Sondheim Award and the Richard Rodgers Foundation Horizon Award for his musical *Bobos*, co-written with playwright Ed Shockley. His 2003 *Riffin' and Pontificatin'* musical tour was filmed for a nationally televised Comcast documentary. He has been featured on national radio and television in North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. He often does his public readings accompanied by a band.

In addition to being an author and a musician, McBride has other attributes. He admits to being the worst dancer in the history of African Americana, bar none (he claims he should be legally barred from dancing at any event he attends). And when he takes off his hat, fleas fly out. Little things, little talents. A native New Yorker and a graduate of New York City public schools, McBride studied composition at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music in Ohio and received his master's degree at the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University. In 2015, he was awarded the National Humanities Medal by President Obama "for humanizing the complexities of discussing race in America." He holds several honorary doctorates and is currently a Distinguished Writer in Residence at New York University.

Malachi the dancer— a Jewish dancer who floats in and out of the novel— a bit wizard-like

Chona— Jewish American who welcomes everyone into her store on Chicken Hill

Moshe Ludlow— Romanian Jewish owner of the All-American Dance Hall and Theater in Pottstown, married to Chona

Isaac— Moshe's older cousin in Philadelphia

Nate Timblin— Black resident on Chicken Hill

Addie Timblin— Respected stateswoman on Chicken Hill, married to Nate

Dodo— Addie's 12-year old nephew who lost his hearing when a stove exploded

Fatty Davis— Black owner of the Juke joint on Chicken Hill

Enzo Carissimi, aka Big Soap— white Italian immigrant on Chicken Hill, close friends with Fatty

Fioria Carissimi— Enzo's mother

Doc Earl Roberts— white doctor and member of Ku Klux Klan

Bernice Davis— Fatty's sister, Chona's neighbor since childhood

Patty Millison aka Newspaper— Black laundress on Chicken Hill and town information spreader

Irv and Marv Skrupskelis— Jewish Lithuanian brother cobblers

Rusty— young Black man on Chicken Hill

Monkey Pants— boy with cerebral palsy at Pennhurst who befriends Dodo

Pia Fabricelli— white cleaning lady and city news sharer

Miggy Fludd— Black woman working at Pennhurst and living on Hemlock Row

Anna Morse— funeral home owner in Linfield

Bags— Rusty's Uncle

Carl Boydkines— Doc's cousin and KKK member

Reverend Ed Spriggs, also known as Snooks— reverend on Chicken Hill

Yakov Flohr— Chona's father, owner of the Heaven & Earth Grocery Store and first rabbi of Ahavat Achim

Karl Feldman— rabbi after Yakov

Shad Davis— Bernice and Fatty's father, stonemason, built Heaven & Earth Grocery Store for Yakov and built Ahavat Achim

Gene— Fatty's older cousin in Philadelphia

Gus Plitzka jr.— city council president and owner of the dairy on Chicken Hill

Bullis— Black man who delivers eggs and coffee to Pennhurst

Son of Man— violent pedophile employed at Pennhurst

1. Why do you think James McBride titled the book *The Heaven & Earth Grocery Store*?
2. Which character in this book resonated with you the most? What character do you wish we got to know more about?
3. How do you think Isaac and Moshe's past impacted their personality? What about Nate?
4. Why do you think Fatty skips Chona's funeral? Why do you think Bernice decides to go?
5. What do you think about Nate's decision to take matters into his own hands instead of taking Isaac up on his offer of hiring a lawyer?
6. Do you think justice was served in this book?
7. What did you think was the funniest moment in the book?
8. Where you satisfied with the ending of the book? What about it do you like or not like?